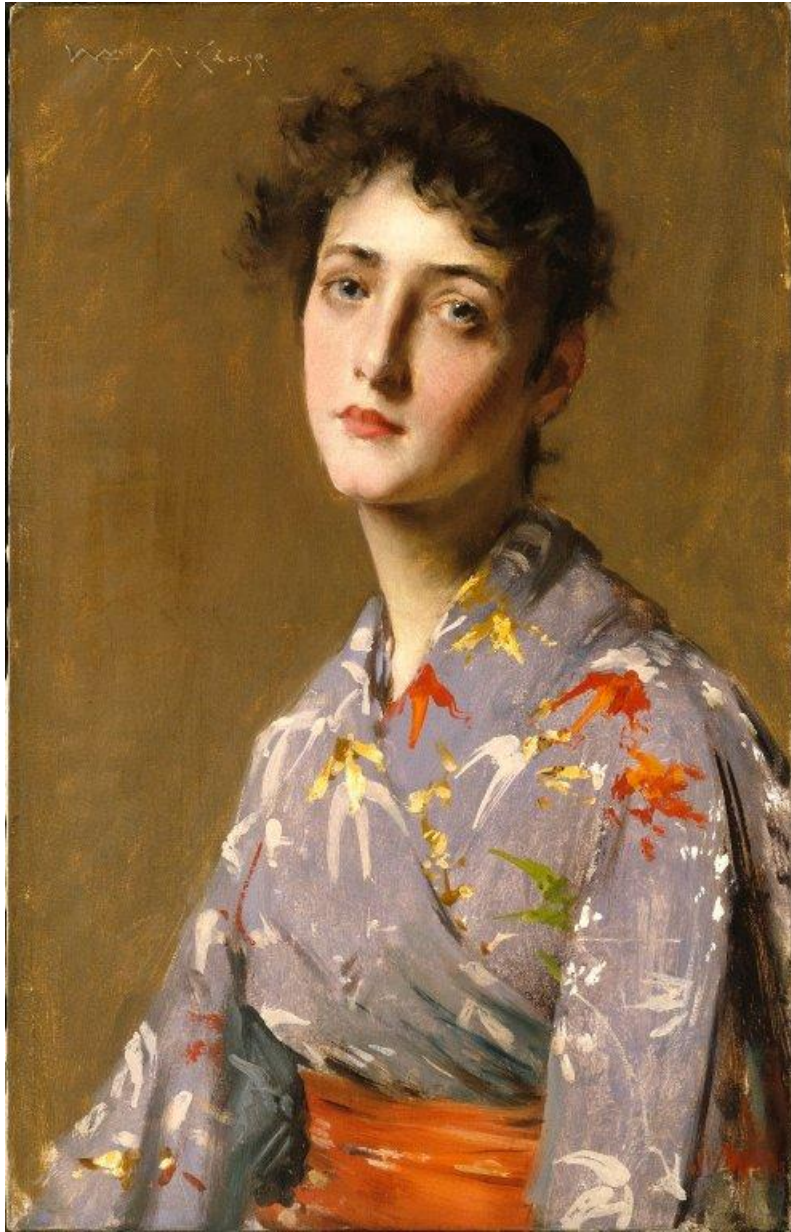


PD LITERATURE

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William Merritt Chase (American, 1849-1916). Girl in a Japanese Costume, ca. 1890. Oil on canvas, 24 5/8 x 15 11/16 in. (62.5 x 39.8 cm). Brooklyn Museum

THE SICK PHYSICIAN

By

DOROTHY CANFIELD

From *THE REAL MOTIVE* (1916)

An Internet Archive E-text.

She had been at first quite the most insignificant element in the life of Newton, a subject of casual comment among the much-occupied, card-playing Marthas of the little suburban village. " Did you know that that new driver for Hanneman's livery-stable is married ? " Betty Holt asked her partner, Mrs. Bodwin. " Yes, that tow-headed foreign-looking boy. They say she's even younger than he. Did anybody make trumps? And of all things, they have a baby! Oh, pshaw ! I didn't mean to play that ace ! " "

Then suddenly, horribly, she became an object of charity. " Oh, Betty . . . those Polacks that live down near the railroad tracks ... he was thrown out by a runaway team and brought home dead ! And there isn't a cent in the house! Somebody's got to see to them. Can't you?"

" Oh, my dear, I couldn't ! My nerves . . . They say the widow is dreadful ! Somebody told Harry that she tried to kill herself when they brought him home. Can't you go?" "Why, my lace curtains are just half on the drying-frames I Don't you suppose Margaret Wagner would? Her horrid husband is off again, and there's nothing to keep her. She's good at handling that sort of folks. The widow's not more than a child herself."

After this, there was a time when she was the tragically insoluble problem which a freak of circumstance threw inexorably into the hands of the busy, bridge-playing suburban matrons. She wanted but one thing, the dark young creature, with her girl's face set in steady anguish, she asked but one boon of the well-dressed, well-fed strangers who came and went through her one-roomed hut . . . she cried out to them to allow her to take her child and follow her husband. There was no other thought in the world for her. She asked them, the wondering, shrinking, half-frightened fair ladies, over and over in her passionate, unintelligible speech, what other course she could take.

" If we could only talk to her ! " cried May Bodwin.

" What would you say to her if we could I " asked Betty Holt unanswerably.

It was the simplest thing in the world that was finally said to her, but it bowed her slim, unresigned shoulders to the burden of life. Mrs. Emery, stealing an hour from little Paul's invalid's room, made the startling discovery that the poverty-stricken young Polack knew French, a pure, fluent speech, quite unlike the halting, boarding-school jargon which was the common Newton version of the language. Mrs. Emery then struggled with the half-forgotten phrases enough to make out that she also spoke German ; and ran to get Margaret Wagner, half German herself. That moody, bitter-lipped, kind-eyed woman took the rebellious child into her empty arms and cried unsparingly, " Sie sind eine hohle! You are a bad woman ! Your little girl may live to be as happy as you have been. And you would keep her from it ! " The widow of Ignace Marwenka stiffened in the other's clasp. " Would I have my child know this hour I now live ? " she cried angrily.

Margaret Wagner held her off at arm's length and asked her piercingly, "If you could forget him, and stop all your grief by forgetting him, would you do it?" The other, for an instant, still faced her with hard, fierce eyes of embittered desolation. Then the shaft went home. For the first time she began to weep and to cry out sobbingly, " Ach, never ! never would I forget ! "

" But you wish to refuse your child that precious thing you would not forget."

The widow flung herself down on the bed in passion of protest. " But it is too hard . . . too hard to live ! Ich kann es nicht! Je ne puis pas! Not even for my baby ! Not even for Lis' Elena ! "

Margaret Wagner knelt down beside her and said brokenly, " There are harder lives that other wives must live. Suppose he left you for other women. Suppose you had no child ! " In all her married life, she had never broken her proud silence before. The long years of her endurance and her reticence looked out from her steady eyes and lighted sadly the path for the bleeding feet of Lisa Marwenka.

She had so shocked her staid and well-regulated

neighbors, little used to violent emotions, that they did not leave her to the impersonal ministrations of charity as they did the other dwellers in the shanties by the railroad tracks. The question of her future now began to occupy them as acutely as the question of persuading her to live had done.

" She says she is willing to do anything to support Lis' Elena," sighed Betty Holt to Mrs. Emery. " But she is so fearfully incompetent. It drives me wild with nerves to have her 'round."

" Incompetent ! Why, didn't you know she can speak French and ..."

" Oh, I mean incompetent for a woman of her class ! She's too ignorant ever to try to teach French . . . she's too ignorant for any use in every way. It's a literal fact that Gretchen Wagner had to show her how to hold a needle ! "

Mrs. Emery shuddered. " And such a helpless child as that to be given the care of a baby! " Her own life was spent in a black prison-house of anxiety over a frail little only son who threatened with every wind that blew to leave the loving hands that clung to him so desperately ... so desperately that life seemed but one long apprehension. " Suppose Lis' Elena should be delicate ! " she shivered again.

" Well she's not, a bit ! " Mrs. Holt reassured her. " She's a big, fat blonde baby, just as different from Lisa as can be. Like the father, I suppose. Well, the only thing to do with Lisa is to try to teach her something useful. Maybe she could learn to wait on table for extra help at dinner-parties, or something like that."

But she did not learn this, or any other occupation which Newton women had been taught to consider useful. It was not for lack of faithful effort on their part and on hers. Day after day, she brought her rosy, yellow-haired child to the home of the Holts, the Bodwins, the Wagners, and the Emerys, and listened docilely to the instructions of those deft-handed housekeepers about sewing, cooking, washing dishes, cleaning, making fires, darning stockings; and to the last day of her service she performed all these operations as badly as at her first attempt. " You don't try ! " Mrs. Bodwin accused her, one day.

She raised fathomless black eyes. " I try to try ! " she said pitifully, in her painful, newly learned English.

Mrs. Bodwin was Connecticut bom, bred, dried, and seasoned, and had no use for sentimentality in the practical matters of life. " I can't keep such a do-less creature. She'd ruin us ! " she said indignantly to Mrs. Holt.

It was a critical period in Lisa's affairs. The four women who had somehow helplessly seemed to saddle themselves with the responsibility for her fate, tried their best to evade this self-assun^ed burden. Their last attempt was to persuade her to let them write her family in Poland for aid. It was a subject they never mentioned to her again, so startled were they by the fanged image of rage which she became at the suggestion. In fact, they never learned from her so much as the name she bore before her marriage. They gathered the evident fact from her that she was highly educated and delicately bred, and from Hanneman, the livery-stable man, only that her husband had been entirely the reverse of these things. " He couldn't read or write, Marwenka couldn't, but he was an awful good sort of fellow for all that ! The finest driver I ever had! He thought lots of his folks, too. There was more than twenty dollars in the purse us boys got up for the widow. And do you know what that doggoned fool woman went and did with it? Bought a gold locket to put a piece from his old coat in (there wa'n't much more'n that left of him after the smash-up) and a gold chain to hang it 'round her neck. She says she's never going to take it off till she dies. And the funeral expenses not paid! No, ma'am, I can't tell you any more about Marwenka."

There were no other sources of information. And they never knew any more. They surmised endless romances about the circumstances which led to the heart-breaking happy union of the two so diverse creatures; but only on one occasion did Lisa by word or act throw any light on her past.

That occasion befell one day in December, the year after her husband's death, when she was sitting dully over a basket of darning in the Emery house. Her four patronesses were gathered around the piano in the next room practising in their chatty, amateurish manner a Christmas carol. All the four had pleasant, light, untrained voices, and occasionally furnished a musical number for the program of a home-made

entertainment. This was for the Christmas party of the Sunday School.

They had chosen an arrangement of a Gounod Christmas chant, and were now admitting the unwisdom of their choice, with their usual comfortable acceptance of narrow limitations. It was quite beyond their capacities, they said unconcernedly to each other, after fumbling through the first measures. Mrs. Emery, the pianist of the group, complained that the accompaniment was too hard for her, and May Bodwin protested at the height of the soprano part.

"I can't sing a decent A, you know I can't," she broke off in the middle of a measure, to remark conversationally, and, at the sound of a sudden explosive exclamation back of her, turned to receive full-face, one of the most startling sensations of her life.

Afterward, each one confessed that she had felt as though a tigress had sprung out at her from a corner of the safe, comfortable sitting-room. Lisa Marwenka stood before them, her face very white, her eyes very black, her attitude tense as a slinger about to launch his bolt. She flung it at them like an insult, "You do not try! You are lazy wit your breathe! You do not try!"

They stared at her! This violent, imperious authority was no one they had ever seen. They shrank from her as she darted in on Mrs. Bodwin, snatching off her belt and commanding with fury, "Breathe! Breathe! Down here where iss my handt . . . deeper . . . now again . . . deeper . . . now think high . . . high . . . HIGH..." she motioned passionately towards the zenith. "Now anodder breathe . . . now . . . heraus! . . . A . . . A!" She struck the note on the piano and stamped her foot. From the throat of the astonished Mrs. Bodwin issued a clear resonant note such as never before in her life had she emitted.

"You can, you see!" Lisa accused her.

"You hypnotized me!" protested the matron, still held by the other's flaming eyes.

"If you try, you can," said Mrs. Marwenka scornfully. "All of you could."

She pushed Mrs. Emery away from the piano-stool

and sat down, striking, without looking at the music, the first chords of the accompaniment. She gathered them up; she swept them along with the quickly increasing impetus of the approach to the glorious opening melody, she hurled them into song with one dramatic word of command. " SING ! " she cried, as though death were the only alternative. And with one accord began the first rehearsal of the Newton Woman's Quartet.

It lasted an hour, sixty minutes of more intense life than the four married, settled ladies had dreamed they were still capable of feeling. Their leader gave them no time to be self-conscious, to wonder at themselves or at her. They existed in the moment, and the moment's impersonal affair was to cast out upon the air the audible embodiment of a noble spiritual truth. Nothing less would their commander receive from them.

She raged at them, she pleaded with them, she sang all their parts in turn, pouring out a powerful, perfectly trained young voice that flooded them and swept them away; she coaxed them over difficult places; she swooped down on them, broad-winged and carried them up in eagle flights to pealing climaxes. Their cheeks were flushed as in their girlhood, their eyes shone star-like. They had forgotten their creeping everyday life. May Bodwin was oblivious to the high price of steak and the need of floor-polish, Betty Holt's nerves but made her the more sensitively alive to this new joy, Mrs. Emery, Paul's mother, for the first time in years, knew a beauty untarnished by fear, and Margaret Wagner caught a glimpse of a door of escape from the humiliating bitterness of her life. They were trembling in excitement, they were singing beyond their wildest dreams of their capacities, but above all they were penetrated, dazzled, drunk with the music. With all their souls they were calling the world to forget its cares as they had forgotten theirs, to worship with them the greatness of humility. Ardently they chanted the words,

" Though low be the chamber, "

They sang fervently.

They were wavering agnostics, lukewarm doubters, all of them,

" Come in! Come in and adore! "

they chanted with uplifted hearts, ecstatic as a company of medieval saints, their eyes fixed on Lisa Marwenka's exalted face of command.

At the end there was a silence, as they looked wonderingly at each other like travelers returned from a distant country. Lisa's cheeks were glistening with tears. She wiped them away with a murmured explanation. " It is the f eerst music I hear in so long."

At last they found their tongues, their voices of everyday prose, and cried out, " But you never told us . . . that you are such a musician as . . . "

She nodded simply, " Ach, yess, it iss all I know. Anything but that wass I nefer taught."

" You must give piano lessons ! " this from Mrs. Emery.

Lisa looked up in astonishment, as if fearing ridicule. " Ach, the piano I play not at all . . . only little . . . very bad. To sing is what I . . . "

They remembered her masterly management of the accompaniment and laughed.

" You must give singing lessons, then."

The widow clasped her hands, " For pay? " She was incredulous ecstasy.

They nodded amply.

" Ach! to earn money for Lis' Elena!" cried the musician.

The others were holding a little aloof from her, still overawed by her Delphic visitation of inspiration for which, as though it were the most obvious and expected of phenomena, she vouchsafed no explanation or apology ; but at that moment occurred an incident which restored the balance of power. Mrs. Bodwin's maid-of-all-work burst in with Lis' Elena choking and strangling in her arms.

Lisa sprang for the child with a piercing scream of terror and held it close to her heart, turning eyes of idiotic terror on the others. "What to do? What to do ! " she cried wildly.

" Stand her on her head and shake her ! " called Mrs. Bodwin, hastening towards them.

Lisa tried tremblingly to obey, but the heavy child slipped from her arms into a struggling heap on the floor, over which she wrung impotent agonized hands.

" This way ! So ! " said Mrs. Bodwin, seizing the sufferer energetically, reversing her under one arm and administering a series of sharp blows to her back. There was a gurgle, a gasp, an indignant yell from Lis' Elena, and a large bone button rolled on the floor.

Lisa fell to her knees, white and shaken, crying out,
" You save her from to die ! You are so wonder
wise ! "

May Bodwin laughed. It is possible that at this moment they had, all of them, some half-conscious divination of what their relations were to be. " You teach us to sing all our songs like that one to-day and we'll take care of the baby for you," she said.

So began a new phase in Lisa's life. She was called Mrs. Marwenka now, and sometimes, " Madame." Newton ladies thought the foreign title " suited her type." The number of her pupils increased rapidly. and before long a chorus was organized, under Mrs. Bodwin's management, although the other three of the original quartet feared for the success of this undertaking. In the first place Lisa insisted that the ladies learn for the first rehearsal, a small part of one of the Bach " Passions," a strange, ascetic choice which augured ill for a miscellaneous gathering of suburban ladies. They were afraid, too, that the courage of their girlish leader might not suffice for the ordeal of facing so large a number of strangers, and addressing them in a half -learned foreign tongue.

But at the first rehearsal, as at all subsequent ones, the same miracle took place. The first chord of the accompaniment transformed the shrinking, insignificant girl into a very Napoleon of music, masterful, sure of herself, inordinately demanding and inordinately giving forth. She launched them upon the sea of harmony with a calm, bold certainty, she swept them from their niggling one-two-three countings out upon broad, swelling waves of noble rhythm whose existence they had not suspected; she sprang at their throats like a tiger-cat at the least sign of flagging and

drew from them impetuous crescendos and ringing climaxes which made the tears of excited pleasure come into their eyes; she fell into a wide-eyed trance of tranquillity and hushed them to heavenly-mild diminishedos . . . and never for an instant did she take from them the consuming fire of her eyes.

At the end, after they had gone through a short section of the " Lamentations " better sung, a thousand times, than any music Newton had ever heard before, she laid down the folded newspaper with which she had been beating time and, dismissing them with a nod, said wearily, "That was verree, verree bad; but better than at feerst. And we will all do better next week."

The spell was over. The women in the chorus drew long breaths, and blinked rapidly, returning with surprise to themselves, to daylight, to the ordinary world, to each other. " Well . . . ! " said a soprano to an alto who in everyday life was her sister, " you don't know how funny it seems to see you with your face and your hat and your gloves, just as usual."

The other understood. " I know. I felt the same way. You were just a voice."

The young leader, a somber, brooding figure in her straight black dress, had come up to this group and was listening. Another woman said, " Why, I haven't felt so stirred up . . . not since I was being courted! I declare that was the way I did feel! I thrilled as though I was falling in love again . . . and my youngest is nine years old ! " "

Lisa laid her thin, long-fingered hand on the other's shoulder. " That iss music," she said solemnly. " Anything smaller than that is not music ... it iss wicked sacrilege. And to have that ... it is enough for any one to live. That iss my Credo."

Flying this flag, she went into single-handed combat with the intrenched forces of emotional and intellectual sloth, and inertia, and so harried, baited, and persecuted them that in six months' time there was to the eye of the most casual observer a definite change in the moral atmosphere of the town. The membership of the bridge-clubs began to decline and the attendance of those who remained technically loyal to cards was uncertain.

Women made fewer aimless " shopping " expeditions into the city; the number of teas and receptions fell off a little, and wardrobes were made ready for the changing seasons with a great abatement from the usual prayerful intensity of care.

There was so little time now ! Their fanatical overseer whipped laggards into line and spurred the leaders forward ! Delving with titanic energy in the pasture-land of Newton femininity, Madame Marwenka blasted yawning cavities among the flowers and grasses and found gold and silver and precious stones, which then with infinite patience she refined and chased and polished and set. She discovered voices in the most unexpected personalities, and having discovered them, performed the far harder exploit of fanning their owners into a flame of purposeful energy.

Margaret Wagner's pleasant alto was found to be a powerful dramatic contralto, the use and development of which was like pure air to an invalid sickened by long confinement. Through the medium of this safe, new speech, she poured out the bitterness which had so long clogged her heart, and, purging her bosom of the perilous stuff, found that life had taught her other and sweeter things. Feeling an exalted sense of this one day, she told her teacher, " Now I see that it is true what you say. Art is enough . . . even what we poor, half-way bunglers may do and know of it. It is enough reason for going on."

They had met in the street, and Lisa was in her unmusical incarnation, a thin, black-robed figure, with deep-set, lusterless eyes. "Told I you that?" she asked, fingering nervously the little golden locket she would always wear until she died . " Told I you that it iss enough ? "

Mrs. Wagner wondered at her, " Why, you said it is your creed."

The foreigner thrust the locket inside the bosom of her dress and turned away. " Oh, yess, it iss my creed! " she murmured uncertainly. She added bravely, however, a moment later, " Please be early at the rehearse to-day."

Mrs. Emery, having but a tiny thread of a non-descript voice, had insisted that the new teacher take up with her her half-forgotten piano, in whose familiar black and white she saw, under the new instruction.

strange meanings. Laboring over the keys, she had sometimes blessed glimpses of a conception of harmony so all-embracing that every fact of life could enter into its great crescendos. "It is the first thing in my life since little Paul's sickness that sets me free of terror," she told Madame Marwenka after an hour of searching, ecstatic toil over a Beethoven Andante. "It makes me understand that life is so great that even death may not take all away from us."

The other's sinuous fingers closed on her locket hard. It was always in her hand. She smiled waveringly. She seemed for a moment even paler than usual. "Ah, you understand that, you say?" she asked, "You understand that now?" She bent over her music suddenly to hide her face. As she went out, she paused in the doorway to say fiercely, "I must work more . . . more!"

It seemed to her four friends that no one could work harder than she at that time, but in the months to come she outdid herself. Newton hummed like a great sea-shell with the echoes of her ceaseless song.

The men of the suburb were not enthusiastic. Naturally they thought of their wives as intended agreeably to supplement and embellish their own kobold-grubbings in the adjacent city. Music as vital self-expression, as the dramatic outpourings of real and potential feeling, music as the wings on which their well-tamed women folk took fiery flight for regions of emotion related in no way to their actual lives, peacefully and inexorably circumscribed by the wedding-ring, this music they feared and distrusted as the devil's work. The author of the electrifying change they came as a body solidly to oppose. She was a morbid foreigner, they said, and all that anybody knew about her was that evidently she had eloped with her father's coachman, and that was the kind of woman she was!

They were consequently little disposed to sympathize with their wives in the joyful excitement which now fell upon those ladies, as a result of a curious sequence of events unimportant in themselves. Somebody or other's second cousin had married the brother of the manager of a company now producing opera in English. The second cousin, coming by chance to spend Sunday in Newton, brought by chance her much-bored managerial brother-in-law and he, by chance, hearing 'Lisa Marwenka, was no longer bored but

vastly startled. From here on 'Lisa's four protecting ladies could scarcely keep pace with the swirl of events. He went to see 'Lisa that afternoon, and she sang for him again. And he sent for 'Lisa to come to his office in the city. . . .

She came back to Newton with her great tidings, showing a faint smile at the exclamations of her " ladies " as she called them, who were quite overcome with scared delight. It was as though an eagle had soared up out of a hen-yard, they felt. 'Lisa tried to moderate their excitement. " It was not the Metro-politan," she told them. " But, if it pleases you — if it pleases you, I am to sing Madama Butterfly— come — von time to see if I do it recht. But only eff I learn dose Englisch wordts so I speak dem goodt. You can teach me dat Englisch, not ? "

They not only taught her that English, but they did nothing for the next week but occupy themselves feverishly with preparations. They made her kimonos for her with their own hands, and the costume of Lis' Elena who was to be the child of the story. They rehearsed the business of her part incessantly with her. They trained Lis' Elena in her role. They held the book with endless patience to correct Lisa's memory. But, anxious not to leave a stone unturned in the path of her success, " Don't you think you would better take a lesson or two in the acting? " they asked her. " It will be all so new for you."

A flame leaped up in the midnight of her eyes. " New ! There is nothing new for me in that story. It is a woman who lives without the husband she loves. And then she kill herself because she have him not. I know. I know ! "

They feared among themselves that this time she was really overconfident. They feared for her memory, for her courage, for her voice, for her presence of mind.

If it had been their own debut, they could not have known more hopeful and terrified hours.

On the night of the performance, they took their seats with heavily beating hearts. They thought that every nerve was strained for Lisa and for Lisa alone, but they had not counted on the new magic of the world to which she had introduced them. It was the first opera they had heard since the opening of their

ears, and with the beginning of the overture, they entered once and for all fully into their kingdom of enchantment. For a moment, all their personal connection with the evening was gone from their minds. They were lost in that finest, most unearthly of all joys, an impersonal impression of art. It marked an epoch in their lives. They heard, they heard what the orchestra was proclaiming. They distinguished the different voices of the different instruments as though archangels were calling to them. They were aware of the rich texture of the harmony, they caught the intricate pattern of modern orchestral music. Lisa and the abandon of her passion in the love-dust of the first act's finale were for the moment, to these listeners, but parts of a glorious whole.

When the curtain went down, however, they came to themselves, and, silenced by the staccato outburst of applause, clasped hands of rapt self-congratulation. From their box they could catch glimpses of what was passing in the wings. The impresario was shaking hands with Lisa between her responses to the applause. Even to their inexperienced eyes, it was plain that the prima donna was accepted.

The next act proved her more than that. If her singing pleased the critics it was her acting which carried away the now aroused audience. Such yearning was in her demand for news of her husband, such an exultation over the arrival of his ship glowed through the oriental dignity of her preparations for his homecoming, that when the curtain fell on the pathetic scene of endless waiting and heart-sick suspense, the audience would not be denied a curtain-call. For a time the management refused, but then, against all tradition, the impresario sent out his new find. Lisa Elena trotting by her side.

The house roared at their appearance. There were shouts from the gallery of "Brava! Brava!" and a loud, pattering storm of applause. Lisa walked across the stage, holding her child by the hand and bowing her thanks. As she passed near her friends she looked into the half-obscurity of their box, her painted face glaringly lighted by the foot-lights. Their enthusiastic hand-clapping stopped suddenly, the smiles of pride and relief and pleasure were stricken from their faces. They shrank together, staring at the expression of her eyes, strange in the smiling mask she held up to the audience. She lifted for them to see, from where it swung low on the breast of her kimono, the little

golden locket, the locket which was always in her hand. She disappeared, Lis' Elena skipping in delight to see their kind familiar faces.

The curtain rose. The four ladies did not stir once during the intolerable pathos of that last scene. At the unsheathing of the dagger, Betty Holt caught a sharp breath, but her eyes did not waver. The child came running in, there was the heartbreaking passage of pretty, tender, desolated mother-chatter while its eyes were bandaged and the dishonored flag set in its hand. The orchestra sent out a sinister note and the woman without a husband passed quietly behind the screen.

The blindfolded child played smilingly with the doll and waved the little flag. The violins filled the hearts of the listeners with ill-omened chords, with tragic and dissonant cadences. The four women in the box were white to the lips.

The music changed. The other actors came running on the stage. The screen was cast down, showing the huddled prostrate figure in the kimono, the blindfolded child was carried off. The curtain went down.

It was a thoroughly dramatic rendition of that most dramatic finale.

The four ladies in the box sat motionless, staring before them. From behind the curtain came an ominous sound of hurrying feet, startled, shocked voices . . . They leaned forward, straining their ears , . .

About them the well-pleased audience stirred and murmured and caught its breath in satisfaction over an artistic triumph. Scraps of talk drifted into the box. " A consummate singer," pronounced the thin-faced elderly man who had taken notes all through the performance. The friends of the prima-donna had conjectured him an influential music-critic. " I never heard that aria before the suicide more admirably phrased."

From a group of enthusiastic music-students whose heads had been bent over the score of the opera, came a girl's fervent voice, " What more could anybody want in the world than to be able to do that ! "

Mrs. Bodwin turned her head. "What are we waiting for?" she asked challengingly. They looked at each other and made no answer.

The door at the back of the box opened and Lis' Elena burst in, the black wig gone from her yellow hair, her eyes dancing. "I dot a box of candy!" she chanted, holding it up at them triumphantly. "The fat man gave it to me for not laughin' when he wiggled his nose. I didn't this time, did I?"

"Where is your mother?" asked Mrs. Emery, in a frightened voice.

Lis' Elena looked about her with cheerful vagueness.

"Oh, back dere, I dess. She told me dis mornin' that as soon as the man carried me out, to run along to you. She said I was to go home wif you. She said you would take care of me."

Betty Holt's hand went to her throat. "Did she . . . did she tell you anything else?"

Lis' Elena nodded. "Yes, she did." Her eyes wandered over the audience. "Oh, see dat lady wif de . . ."

"What did she say? What did she say?" They bent over her urgently.

"Why . . . why . . . oh, yes, . . . she said to tell you that her part was so hard for her to play, she'd have to rest now."

From behind the curtain came an ominous sound of slow feet, stepping heavily, weighted with a burden. . . .

The four, pale, motherly women closed about the smiling little girl, shielding her from the stage. Margaret Wagner stifled a cry and knelt down by the singer's child.

"What is this around your neck!" she asked in a horrified whisper.

"My mamma put it around my neck," said Lisa Elena.

It was the little golden locket.



A ROSE-SONG

From: Project Gutenberg's *Pan-Worship and Other Poems*, by Eleanor Farjeon
1908

Oh, what a realm, what a riot of roses!
Here we stand
Right in the heart of a great rose-land!
Over our head the blossom-world closes,
Under our feet—
Walls, ceil and carpet are flowery-sweet.

Snowy and crimson and pink and golden
Twine and trail,
Vivid as life is, as death is, pale.
Here they bloom as they bloomed in olden
Days when we
Were unborn shades, and the shades that be

Had right in these grounds to resent intrusion.
Now you and I
Jealously cherish our privacy.
How came these roses by their profusion,
Tier on tier
Of bloom on bloom running uncurb'd here?

I think I can guess what they would answer,
Whence they came,
Pallid petal and flower of flame,
Inscribed with such lore as the old romancer
Of Italy
Left the world to make love-songs by.

We are born, these pink roses say, of kisses,
Dye of the blush.
What though time's passage their soft lisp hush?
The seeds were scattered of lovers' blisses,
And year by year
We renew their tender caresses here.

We are born of joy, say these petals yellow,
Tinge of delight.
What though love's sunshine be lapped in night?
We, sprung from its seeds, rich-toned and mellow,
Perpetuate

The days when the orbit of love waxed great.

We are born, these red ones say, of passion,
Flush of the heart.
What though the sound of love's steps depart?
The seeds were sown, and we in this fashion
Immortalize
Remembrance thereof in the heart's own dyes.

We are born, say these snow-white blooms, of the spirit,
Children of death.
What is the ceasing of mere life-breath?
Love is sustained by its own pure merit,
Its memory
Renewed and renewed to infinity.

Belov'd, we are adding to these rose-bowers.
When we have passed
Here our hearts' treasure will lie amassed.
Pink, gold, crimson and snowy flowers,
Thus and thus,
To the limit of time will bloom for us.



THE WIND BLOWS

From: Project Gutenberg's *Bliss, and Other Stories*, by Katherine Mansfield
1920

SUDDENLY--dreadfully--she wakes up. What has happened? Something dreadful has happened. No--nothing has happened. It is only the wind shaking the house, rattling the windows, banging a piece of iron on the roof and making her bed tremble. Leaves flutter past the window, up and away; down in the avenue a whole newspaper wags in the air like a lost kite and falls, spiked on a pine tree. It is cold. Summer is over--it is autumn--everything is ugly. The carts rattle by, swinging from side to side; two Chinamen lollop along under their wooden yokes with the straining vegetable baskets--their pigtails and blue blouses fly out in the wind. A white dog on three legs yelps past the gate. It is all over! What is? Oh, everything! And she begins to plait her hair with shaking fingers, not daring to look in the glass. Mother is talking to grandmother in the hall.

"A perfect idiot! Imagine leaving anything out on the line in weather like this. . . . Now my best little Teneriffe-work tea-cloth is simply in ribbons. _What_ is that extraordinary smell? It's the porridge burning. Oh, heavens--this wind!"

She has a music lesson at ten o'clock. At the thought the minor movement of the Beethoven begins to play in her head, the trills long and terrible like little rolling drums. . . . Marie Swainson runs into the garden next door to pick the "chrysanthos" before they are ruined. Her skirt flies up above her waist; she tries to beat it down, to tuck it between her legs while she stoops, but it is no use--up it flies. All the trees and bushes beat about her. She picks as quickly as she can but she is quite distracted. She doesn't mind what she does--she pulls the plants up by the roots and bends and twists them, stamping her foot and swearing.

"For heaven's sake keep the front door shut! Go round to the back," shouts someone. And then she hears Bogey:

"Mother, you're wanted on the telephone. Telephone, Mother. It's the butcher."

How hideous life is--revolting, simply revolting. . . . And now her hat-elastic's snapped. Of course it would. She'll wear her old tam and slip out the back way. But Mother has seen.

"Matilda. Matilda. Come back im-me-diately! What on earth have you got on your head? It looks like a tea cosy. And why have you got that mane of hair on your forehead."

"I can't come back. Mother. I'll be late for my lesson."

"Come back immediately!"

She won't. She won't. She hates Mother. "Go to hell," she shouts, running down the road.

In waves, in clouds, in big round whirls the dust comes stinging, and with it little bits of straw and chaff and manure. There is a loud roaring sound from the trees in the gardens, and standing at the bottom of the road outside Mr. Bullen's gate she can hear the sea sob: "Ah! . . . Ah! . . . Ah-h!" But Mr. Bullen's drawing-room is as quiet as a cave. The windows are closed, the blinds half pulled, and she is not late. The-girl-before-her has just started playing MacDowell's "To an Iceberg." Mr. Bullen looks over at her and half smiles.

"Sit down," he says. "Sit over there in the sofa corner, little lady."

How funny he is. He doesn't exactly laugh at you . . . but there is just something. . . . Oh, how peaceful it is here. She likes this room. It smells of art serge and stale smoke and chrysanthemums . . .

there is a big vase of them on the mantelpiece behind the pale photograph of Rubinstein . . . *à mon ami Robert Bullen.* . . . Over the black glittering piano hangs "Solitude"--a dark tragic woman draped in white, sitting on a rock, her knees crossed, her chin on her hands.

"No, no!" says Mr. Bullen, and he leans over the other girl, put his arms over her shoulders and plays the passage for her. The stupid--she's blushing! How ridiculous!

Now the girl before her has gone; the front door slams. Mr. Bullen comes back and walks up and down, very softly, waiting for her. What an extraordinary thing. Her fingers tremble so that she can't undo the knot in the music satchel. It's the wind. . . . And her heart beats so hard she feels it must lift her blouse up and down. Mr. Bullen does not say a word. The shabby red piano seat is long enough for two people to sit side by side. Mr. Bullen sits down by her.

"Shall I begin with scales," she asks, squeezing her hands together. "I had some arpeggios, too."

But he does not answer. She doesn't believe he even hears . . . and then suddenly his fresh hand with the ring on it reaches over and opens Beethoven.

"Let's have a little of the old master," he says.

But why does he speak so kindly--so awfully kindly--and as though they had known each other for years and years and knew everything about each other.

He turns the page slowly. She watches his hand--it is a very nice hand and always looks as though it had just been washed.

"Here we are," says Mr. Bullen.

Oh, that kind voice--Oh, that minor movement. Here come the little drums. . . .

"Shall I take the repeat?"

"Yes, dear child."

His voice is far, far too kind. The crotchets and quavers are dancing up and down the stave like little black boys on a fence. Why is he so . . . She will not cry--she has nothing to cry about. . . .

"What is it, dear child?"

Mr. Bullen takes her hands. His shoulder is there--just by her head. She leans on it ever so little, her cheek against the springy tweed.

"Life is so dreadful," she murmurs, but she does not feel it's dreadful at all. He says something about "waiting" and "marking time" and "that rare thing, a woman," but she does not hear. It is so comfortable . . . for ever . . .

Suddenly the door opens and in pops Marie Swainson, hours before her time.

"Take the allegretto a little faster," says Mr. Bullen, and gets up and begins to walk up and down again.

"Sit in the sofa corner, little lady," he says to Marie.

The wind, the wind. It's frightening to be here in her room by herself. The bed, the mirror, the white jug and basin gleam like the sky outside. It's the bed that is frightening. There it lies, sound asleep. . . . Does Mother imagine for one moment that she is going to darn all those stockings knotted up on the quilt like a coil of snakes? She's not. No, Mother. I do not see why I should. . . . The wind--the wind! There's a funny smell of soot blowing down the chimney. Hasn't anyone written poems to the wind? . . . "I bring fresh flowers to the leaves and showers." . . . What nonsense.

"Is that you, Bogey?"

"Come for a walk round the esplanade, Matilda. I can't stand this any longer."

"Right-o. I'll put on my ulster. Isn't it an awful day!" Bogey's ulster is just like hers. Hooking the collar she looks at herself in the glass. Her face is white, they have the same excited eyes and hot lips. Ah, they know those two in the glass. Good-bye, dears; we shall be back soon.

"This is better, isn't it?"

"Hook on," says Bogey.

They cannot walk fast enough. Their heads bent, their legs just touching, they stride like one eager person through the town, down the asphalt zigzag where the fennel grows wild and on to the esplanade. It is dusky--just getting dusky. The wind is so strong that they have to fight their way through it, rocking like two old drunkards. All the poor little pahutukawas on the esplanade are bent to the ground.

"Come on! Come on! Let's get near."

Over by the breakwater the sea is very high. They pull off their hats

and her hair blows across her mouth, tasting of salt. The sea is so high that the waves do not break at all; they thump against the rough stone wall and suck up the weedy, dripping steps. A fine spray skims from the water right across the esplanade. They are covered with drops; the inside of her mouth tastes wet and cold.

Bogey's voice is breaking. When he speaks he rushes up and down the scale. It's funny--it makes you laugh--and yet it just suits the day. The wind carries their voices--away fly the sentences like little narrow ribbons.

"Quicker! Quicker!"

It is getting very dark. In the harbour the coal hulks show two lights--one high on a mast, and one from the stern.

"Look, Bogey. Look over there."

A big black steamer with a long loop of smoke streaming, with the portholes lighted, with lights everywhere, is putting out to sea. The wind does not stop her; she cuts through the waves, making for the open gate between the pointed rocks that leads to . . . It's the light that makes her look so awfully beautiful and mysterious. . . . They are on board leaning over the rail arm in arm.

". . . Who are they?"

". . . Brother and sister."

"Look, Bogey, there's the town. Doesn't it look small? There's the post office clock chiming for the last time. There's the esplanade where we walked that windy day. Do you remember? I cried at my music lesson that day--how many years ago! Good-bye, little island, good-bye. . . ."

Now the dark stretches a wing over the tumbling water. They can't see those two any more. Good-bye, good-bye. Don't forget. . . . But the ship is gone, now.

The wind--the wind.



The Project Gutenberg EBook of
Pictures Don't Lie, by Katherine MacLean
1951

... Pictures, that is, that one can test and measure.
And these pictures positively, absolutely could not lie!

The man from the _News_ asked, "What do you think of the aliens, Mister Nathen? Are they friendly? Do they look human?"

"Very human," said the thin young man.

Outside, rain sleeted across the big windows with a steady faint drumming, blurring and dimming the view of the airfield where _they_ would arrive. On the concrete runways, the puddles were pockmarked with rain, and the grass growing untouched between the runways of the unused field glistened wetly, bending before gusts of wind.

Back at a respectful distance from where the huge spaceship would land were the gray shapes of trucks, where TV camera crews huddled inside their mobile units, waiting. Farther back in the deserted sandy landscape, behind distant sandy hills, artillery was ringed in a great circle, and in the distance across the horizon, bombers stood ready at airfields, guarding the world against possible treachery from the first alien ship ever to land from space.

"Do you know anything about their home planet?" asked the man from _Herald_.

The _Times_ man stood with the others, listening absently, thinking of questions, but reserving them. Joseph R. Nathen, the thin young man with the straight black hair and the tired lines on his face, was being treated with respect by his interviewers. He was obviously on edge, and they did not want to harry him with too many questions to answer at once. They wanted to keep his good will. Tomorrow he would be one of the biggest celebrities ever to appear in headlines.

"No, nothing directly."

"Any ideas or deductions?" _Herald_ persisted.

"Their world must be Earth-like to them," the weary-looking young man answered uncertainly. "The environment evolves the animal. But only in relative terms, of course." He looked at them with a quick glance and then looked away evasively, his lank black hair beginning to cling to his forehead with sweat. "That doesn't necessarily mean anything."

"Earth-like," muttered a reporter, writing it down as if he had noticed nothing more in the reply.

The _Times_ man glanced at the _Herald_, wondering if he had noticed, and received a quick glance in exchange.

The _Herald_ asked Nathen, "You think they are dangerous, then?"

It was the kind of question, assuming much, which usually broke reticence and brought forth quick facts--when it hit the mark. They all knew of the military precautions, although they were not supposed to know.

The question missed. Nathen glanced out the window vaguely. "No, I wouldn't say so."

"You think they are friendly, then?" said the _Herald_, equally positive on the opposite tack.

A fleeting smile touched Nathen's lips. "Those I know are."

There was no lead in this direction, and they had to get the basic facts of the story before the ship came. The _Times_ asked, "What led up to your contacting them?"

Nathen answered after a hesitation. "Static. Radio static. The Army told you my job, didn't they?"

* * * * *

The Army had told them nothing at all. The officer who had conducted them in for the interview stood glowering watchfully, as if he objected by instinct to telling anything to the public.

Nathen glanced at him doubtfully. "My job is radio decoder for the Department of Military Intelligence. I use a directional pickup, tune in on foreign bands, record any scrambled or coded messages I hear, and build automatic decoders and descramblers for all the basic scramble patterns."

The officer cleared his throat, but said nothing.

The reporters smiled, noting that down.

Security regulations had changed since arms inspection had been legalized by the U.N. Complete information being the only public security against secret rearmament, spying and prying had come to seem a public service. Its aura had changed. It was good public relations to admit to it.

Nathen continued, "I started directing the pickup at stars in my spare time. There's radio noise from stars, you know. Just stuff that sounds like spatter static, and an occasional squawk. People have been

listening to it for a long time, and researching, trying to work out why stellar radiation on those bands comes in such jagged bursts. It didn't seem natural."

He paused and smiled uncertainly, aware that the next thing he would say was the thing that would make him famous--an idea that had come to him while he listened--an idea as simple and as perfect as the one that came to Newton when he saw the apple fall.

"I decided it wasn't natural. I tried decoding it."

Hurriedly he tried to explain it away and make it seem obvious. "You see, there's an old intelligence trick, speeding up a message on a record until it sounds just like that, a short squawk of static, and then broadcasting it. Undergrounds use it. I'd heard that kind of screech before."

"You mean they broadcast at us in code?" asked the _News_.

"It's not exactly code. All you need to do is record it and slow it down. They're not broadcasting at us. If a star has planets, inhabited planets, and there is broadcasting between them, they would send it on a tight beam to save power." He looked for comprehension. "You know, like a spotlight. Theoretically, a tight beam can go on forever without losing power. But aiming would be difficult from planet to planet. You can't expect a beam to stay on target, over such distances, more than a few seconds at a time. So they'd naturally compress each message into a short half-second or one-second-length package and send it a few hundred times in one long blast to make sure it is picked up during the instant the beam swings across the target."

He was talking slowly and carefully, remembering that this explanation was for the newspapers. "When a stray beam swings through our section of space, there's a sharp peak in noise level from that direction. The beams are swinging to follow their own planets at home, and the distance between there and here exaggerates the speed of swing tremendously, so we wouldn't pick up more than a bip as it passes."

"How do you account for the number of squawks coming in?" the _Times_ asked. "Do stellar systems rotate on the plane of the Galaxy?" It was a private question; he spoke impulsively from interest and excitement.

The radio decoder grinned, the lines of strain vanishing from his face for a moment. "Maybe we're intercepting everybody's telephone calls, and the whole Galaxy is swarming with races that spend all day yacking at each other over the radio. Maybe the human type is standard model."

"It would take something like that," the _Times_ agreed. They smiled at each other.

The _News_ asked, "How did you happen to pick up television instead of

voices?"

"Not by accident," Nathen explained patiently. "I'd recognized a scanning pattern, and I wanted pictures. Pictures are understandable in any language."

* * * * *

Near the interviewers, a Senator paced back and forth, muttering his memorized speech of welcome and nervously glancing out the wide streaming windows into the gray sleeting rain.

Opposite the windows of the long room was a small raised platform flanked by the tall shapes of TV cameras and sound pickups on booms, and darkened floodlights, arranged and ready for the Senator to make his speech of welcome to the aliens and the world. A shabby radio sending set stood beside it without a case to conceal its parts, two cathode television tubes flickering nakedly on one side and the speaker humming on the other. A vertical panel of dials and knobs jutted up before them and a small hand-mike sat ready on the table before the panel. It was connected to a boxlike, expensively cased piece of equipment with "Radio Lab, U.S. Property" stenciled on it.

"I recorded a couple of package screeches from Sagittarius and began working on them," Nathen added. "It took a couple of months to find the synchronizing signals and set the scanners close enough to the right time to even get a pattern. When I showed the pattern to the Department, they gave me full time to work on it, and an assistant to help. It took eight months to pick out the color bands, and assign them the right colors, to get anything intelligible on the screen."

* * * * *

The shabby-looking mess of exposed parts was the original receiver that they had labored over for ten months, adjusting and readjusting to reduce the maddening rippling plaids of unsynchronized color scanners to some kind of sane picture.

"Trial and error," said Nathen, "but it came out all right. The wide band-spread of the squawks had suggested color TV from the beginning."

He walked over and touched the set. The speaker bipped slightly and the gray screen flickered with a flash of color at the touch. The set was awake and sensitive, tuned to receive from the great interstellar spaceship which now circled the atmosphere.

"We wondered why there were so many bands, but when we got the set working, and started recording and playing everything that came in, we found we'd tapped something like a lending library line. It was all fiction, plays."

Between the pauses in Nathen's voice, the _Times_ found himself unconsciously listening for the sound of roaring, swiftly approaching rocket jets.

The _Post_ asked, "How did you contact the spaceship?"

"I scanned and recorded a film copy of _Rite of Spring_, the Disney-Stravinsky combination, and sent it back along the same line we were receiving from. Just testing. It wouldn't get there for a good number of years, if it got there at all, but I thought it would please the library to get a new record in.

"Two weeks later, when we caught and slowed a new batch of recordings, we found an answer. It was obviously meant for us. It was a flash of the Disney being played to a large audience, and then the audience sitting and waiting before a blank screen. The signal was very clear and loud. We'd intercepted a spaceship. They were asking for an encore, you see. They liked the film and wanted more...."

He smiled at them in sudden thought. "You can see them for yourself. It's all right down the hall where the linguists are working on the automatic translator."

The listening officer frowned and cleared his throat, and the thin young man turned to him quickly. "No security reason why they should not see the broadcasts, is there? Perhaps you should show them." He said to the reporters reassuringly, "It's right down the hall. You will be informed the moment the spaceship approaches."

The interview was very definitely over. The lank-haired, nervous young man turned away and seated himself at the radio set while the officer swallowed his objections and showed them dourly down the hall to a closed door.

They opened it and fumbled into a darkened room crowded with empty folding chairs, dominated by a glowing bright screen. The door closed behind them, bringing total darkness.

There was the sound of reporters fumbling their way into seats around him, but the _Times_ man remained standing, aware of an enormous surprise, as if he had been asleep and wakened to find himself in the wrong country.

The bright colors of the double image seemed the only real thing in the darkened room. Even blurred as they were, he could see that the action was subtly different, the shapes subtly not right.

He was looking at aliens.

* * * * *

The impression was of two humans disguised, humans moving oddly, half-dancing, half-crippled. Carefully, afraid the images would go away, he reached up to his breast pocket, took out his polarized glasses, rotated one lens at right angles to the other and put them on.

Immediately, the two beings came into sharp focus, real and solid, and the screen became a wide, illusively near window through which he watched them.

They were conversing with each other in a gray-walled room, discussing something with restrained excitement. The large man in the green tunic closed his purple eyes for an instant at something the other said, and grimaced, making a motion with his fingers as if shoving something away from him.

Mellerdrammer.

The second, smaller, with yellowish-green eyes, stepped closer, talking more rapidly in a lower voice. The first stood very still, not trying to interrupt.

Obviously, the proposal was some advantageous treachery, and he wanted to be persuaded. The _Times_ groped for a chair and sat down.

Perhaps gesture is universal; desire and aversion, a leaning forward or a leaning back, tension, relaxation. Perhaps these actors were masters. The scenes changed, a corridor, a parklike place in what he began to realize was a spaceship, a lecture room. There were others talking and working, speaking to the man in the green tunic, and never was it unclear what was happening or how they felt.

They talked a flowing language with many short vowels and shifts of pitch, and they gestured in the heat of talk, their hands moving with an odd lagging difference of motion, not slow, but somehow drifting.

He ignored the language, but after a time the difference in motion began to arouse his interest. Something in the way they walked....

With an effort he pulled his mind from the plot and forced his attention to the physical difference. Brown hair in short silky crew cuts, varied eye colors, the colors showing clearly because their irises were very large, their round eyes set very widely apart in tapering light-brown faces. Their necks and shoulders were thick in a way that would indicate unusual strength for a human, but their wrists were narrow and their fingers long and thin and delicate.

There seemed to be more than the usual number of fingers.

Since he came in, a machine had been whirring and a voice muttering beside him. He called his attention from counting their fingers and looked around. Beside him sat an alert-looking man wearing earphones,

watching and listening with hawklike concentration. Beside him was a tall streamlined box. From the screen came the sound of the alien language. The man abruptly flipped a switch on the box, muttered a word into a small hand-microphone and flipped the switch back with nervous rapidity.

He reminded the _Times_ man of the earphoned interpreters at the UN. The machine was probably a vocal translator and the mutterer a linguist adding to its vocabulary. Near the screen were two other linguists taking notes.

* * * * *

The _Times_ remembered the Senator pacing in the observatory room, rehearsing his speech of welcome. The speech would not be just the empty pompous gesture he had expected. It would be translated mechanically and understood by the aliens.

On the other side of the glowing window that was the stereo screen, the large protagonist in the green tunic was speaking to a pilot in a gray uniform. They stood in a brightly lit canary-yellow control room in a spaceship.

The _Times_ tried to pick up the thread of the plot. Already he was interested in the fate of the hero, and liked him. That was the effect of good acting, probably, for part of the art of acting is to win affection from the audience, and this actor might be the matinee idol of whole solar systems.

Controlled tension, betraying itself by a jerk of the hands, a too-quick answer to a question. The uniformed one, not suspicious, turned his back, busying himself at some task involving a map lit with glowing red points, his motions sharing the same fluid dragging grace of the others, as if they were underwater, or on a slow motion film. The other was watching a switch, a switch set into a panel, moving closer to it, talking casually--background music coming and rising in thin chords of tension.

There was a closeup of the alien's face watching the switch, and the _Times_ noted that his ears were symmetrically half-circles, almost perfect with no earholes visible. The voice of the uniformed one answered, a brief word in a preoccupied deep voice. His back was still turned. The other glanced at the switch, moving closer to it, talking casually, the switch coming closer and closer stereoscopically. It was in reach, filling the screen. His hand came into view, darting out, closed over the switch--

There was a sharp clap of sound and his hand opened in a frozen shape of pain. Beyond him, as his gaze swung up, stood the figure of the uniformed officer, unmoving, a weapon rigid in his hand, in the startled position in which he had turned and fired, watching with

widening eyes as the man in the green tunic swayed and fell.

The tableau held, the uniformed one drooping, looking down at his hand holding the weapon which had killed, and music began to build in from the background. Just for an instant, the room and the things within it flashed into one of those bewildering color changes which were the bane of color television, and switched to a color negative of itself, a green man standing in a violet control room, looking down at the body of a green man in a red tunic. It held for less than a second; then the color band alternator fell back into phase and the colors reversed to normal.

Another uniformed man came and took the weapon from the limp hand of the other, who began to explain dejectedly in a low voice while the music mounted and covered his words and the screen slowly went blank, like a window that slowly filmed over with gray fog.

The music faded.

In the dark, someone clapped appreciatively.

The earphoned man beside the _Times_ shifted his earphones back from his ears and spoke briskly. "I can't get any more. Either of you want a replay?"

There was a short silence until the linguist nearest the set said, "I guess we've squeezed that one dry. Let's run the tape where Nathen and that ship radio boy are kidding around CQing and tuning their beams in closer. I have a hunch the boy is talking routine ham talk and giving the old radio count--one-two-three-testing."

There was some fumbling in the semi-dark and then the screen came to life again.

* * * * *

It showed a flash of an audience sitting before a screen and gave a clipped chord of some familiar symphony. "Crazy about Stravinsky and Mozart," remarked the earphoned linguist to the _Times_, resettling his earphones. "Can't stand Gershwin. Can you beat that?" He turned his attention back to the screen as the right sequence came on.

The _Post_, who was sitting just in front of him, turned to the _Times_ and said, "Funny how much they look like people." He was writing, making notes to telephone his report. "What color hair did that character have?"

"I didn't notice." He wondered if he should remind the reporter that Nathen had said he assigned the color bands on guess, choosing the colors that gave the most plausible images. The guests, when they arrived, could turn out to be bright green with blue hair. Only the

gradations of color in the picture were sure, only the similarities and contrasts, the relationship of one color to another.

From the screen came the sound of the alien language again. This race averaged deeper voices than human. He liked deep voices. Could he write that?

No, there was something wrong with that, too. How had Nathen established the right sound-track pitch? Was it a matter of taking the modulation as it came in, or some sort of hetrodyning up and down by trial and error? Probably.

It might be safer to assume that Nathen had simply preferred deep voices.

As he sat there, doubting, an uneasiness he had seen in Nathen came back to add to his own uncertainty, and he remembered just how close that uneasiness had come to something that looked like restrained fear.

"What I don't get is why he went to all the trouble of picking up TV shows instead of just contacting them," the _News_ complained. "They're good shows, but what's the point?"

"Maybe so we'd get to learn their language too," said the _Herald_.

On the screen now was the obviously unstaged and genuine scene of a young alien working over a bank of apparatus. He turned and waved and opened his mouth in the comical O shape which the _Times_ was beginning to recognize as their equivalent of a smile, then went back to trying to explain something about the equipment, in elaborate awkward gestures and carefully mouthed words.

The _Times_ got up quietly, went out into the bright white stone corridor and walked back the way he had come, thoughtfully folding his stereo glasses and putting them away.

No one stopped him. Secrecy restrictions were ambiguous here. The reticence of the Army seemed more a matter of habit, mere reflex, from the fact that it had all originated in the Intelligence Department, than any reasoned policy of keeping the landing a secret.

The main room was more crowded than he had left it. The TV camera and sound crew stood near their apparatus, the Senator had found a chair and was reading, and at the far end of the room eight men were grouped in a circle of chairs, arguing something with impassioned concentration. The _Times_ recognized a few he knew personally, eminent names in science, workers in field theory.

A stray phrase reached him: "reference to the universal constants as ratio--" It was probably a discussion of ways of converting formulas from one mathematics to another for a rapid exchange of information.

They had reason to be intent, aware of the flood of insights that novel viewpoints could bring, if they could grasp them. He would have liked to go over and listen, but there was too little time left before the spaceship was due, and he had a question to ask.

* * * * *

The hand-rigged transceiver was still humming, tuned to the sending band of the circling ship, and the young man who had started it all was sitting on the edge of the TV platform with his chin resting in one hand. He did not look up as the _Times_ approached, but it was the indifference of preoccupation, not discourtesy.

The _Times_ sat down on the edge of the platform beside him and took out a pack of cigarettes, then remembered the coming TV broadcast and the ban on smoking. He put them away, thoughtfully watching the diminishing rain spray against the streaming windows.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Nathen showed that he was aware and friendly by a slight motion of his head.

"_You_ tell me."

"Hunch," said the _Times_ man. "Sheer hunch. Everything sailing along too smoothly, everyone taking too much for granted."

Nathen relaxed slightly. "I'm still listening."

"Something about the way they move...."

Nathen shifted to glance at him.

"That's bothered me, too."

"Are you sure they're adjusted to the right speed?"

Nathen clenched his hands out in front of him and looked at them consideringly. "I don't know. When I turn the tape faster, they're all rushing, and you begin to wonder why their clothes don't stream behind them, why the doors close so quickly and yet you can't hear them slam, why things fall so fast. If I turn it slower, they all seem to be swimming." He gave the _Times_ a considering sidewise glance. "Didn't catch the name."

Country-bred guy, thought the _Times_. "Jacob Luke, _Times_," he said, extending his hand.

Nathen gave the hand a quick, hard grip, identifying the name. "Sunday

Science Section editor. I read it. Surprised to meet you here."

"Likewise." The _Times_ smiled. "Look, have you gone into this rationally, with formulas?" He found a pencil in his pocket.

"Obviously there's something wrong with our judgment of their weight-to-speed-to-momentum ratio. Maybe it's something simple like low gravity aboard ship, with magnetic shoes. Maybe they _are_ floating slightly."

"Why worry?" Nathen cut in. "I don't see any reason to try to figure it out now." He laughed and shoved back his black hair nervously. "We'll see them in twenty minutes."

"Will we?" asked the _Times_ slowly.

There was a silence while the Senator turned a page of his magazine with a slight crackling of paper, and the scientists argued at the other end of the room. Nathen pushed at his lank black hair again, as if it were trying to fall forward in front of his eyes and keep him from seeing.

"Sure." The young man laughed suddenly, talked rapidly. "Sure we'll see them. Why shouldn't we, with all the government ready with welcome speeches, the whole Army turned out and hiding over the hill, reporters all around, newsreel cameras--everything set up to broadcast the landing to the world. The President himself shaking hands with me and waiting in Washington--"

He came to the truth without pausing for breath.

He said, "Hell, no, they won't get here. There's some mistake somewhere. Something's wrong. I should have told the brasshats yesterday when I started adding it up. Don't know why I didn't say anything. Scared, I guess. Too much top rank around here. Lost my nerve."

He clutched the _Times_ man's sleeve. "Look. I don't know what--"

A green light flashed on the sending-receiving set. Nathen didn't look at it, but he stopped talking.

* * * * *

The loudspeaker on the set broke into a voice speaking in the alien's language. The Senator started and looked nervously at it, straightening his tie. The voice stopped.

Nathen turned and looked at the loudspeaker. His worry seemed to be gone.

"What is it?" the _Times_ asked anxiously.

"He says they've slowed enough to enter the atmosphere now. They'll be here in five to ten minutes, I guess. That's Bud. He's all excited. He says holy smoke, what a murky-looking planet we live on." Nathen smiled. "Kidding."

The _Times_ was puzzled. "What does he mean, murky? It can't be raining over much territory on Earth." Outside, the rain was slowing and bright blue patches of sky were shining through breaks in the cloud blanket, glittering blue light from the drops that ran down the windows. He tried to think of an explanation. "Maybe they're trying to land on Venus." The thought was ridiculous, he knew. The spaceship was following Nathen's sending beam. It couldn't miss Earth. "Bud" had to be kidding.

The green light glowed on the set again, and they stopped speaking, waiting for the message to be recorded, slowed and replayed. The cathode screen came to life suddenly with a picture of the young man sitting at his sending-set, his back turned, watching a screen at one side which showed a glimpse of a huge dark plain approaching. As the ship plunged down toward it, the illusion of solidity melted into a boiling turbulence of black clouds. They expanded in an inky swirl, looked huge for an instant, and then blackness swallowed the screen. The young alien swung around to face the camera, speaking a few words as he moved, made the O of a smile again, then flipped the switch and the screen went gray.

Nathen's voice was suddenly toneless and strained. "He said something like break out the drinks, here they come."

"The atmosphere doesn't look like that," the _Times_ said at random, knowing he was saying something too obvious even to think about. "Not Earth's atmosphere."

Some people drifted up. "What did they say?"

"Entering the atmosphere, ought to be landing in five or ten minutes," Nathen told them.

A ripple of heightened excitement ran through the room. Cameramen began adjusting the lens angles again, turning on the mike and checking it, turning on the floodlights. The scientists rose and stood near the window, still talking. The reporters trooped in from the hall and went to the windows to watch for the great event. The three linguists came in, trundling a large wheeled box that was the mechanical translator, supervising while it was hitched into the sound broadcasting system.

"Landing where?" the _Times_ asked Nathen brutally. "Why don't you do something?"

"Tell me what to do and I'll do it," Nathen said quietly, not moving.

It was not sarcasm. Jacob Luke of the _Times_ looked sidewise at the strained whiteness of his face, and moderated his tone. "Can't you contact them?"

"Not while they're landing."

"What now?" The _Times_ took out a pack of cigarettes, remembered the rule against smoking, and put it back.

"We just wait." Nathen leaned his elbow on one knee and his chin in his hand.

They waited.

* * * * *

All the people in the room were waiting. There was no more conversation. A bald man of the scientist group was automatically buffing his fingernails over and over and inspecting them without seeing them, another absently polished his glasses, held them up to the light, put them on, and then a moment later took them off and began polishing again. The television crew concentrated on their jobs, moving quietly and efficiently, with perfectionist care, minutely arranging things which did not need to be arranged, checking things that had already been checked.

This was to be one of the great moments of human history, and they were all trying to forget that fact and remain impassive and wrapped up in the problems of their jobs as good specialists should.

After an interminable age the _Times_ consulted his watch. Three minutes had passed. He tried holding his breath a moment, listening for a distant approaching thunder of jets. There was no sound.

The sun came out from behind the clouds and lit up the field like a great spotlight on an empty stage.

Abruptly the green light shone on the set again, indicating that a squawk message had been received. The recorder recorded it, slowed it and fed it back to the speaker. It clicked and the sound was very loud in the still, tense room.

The screen remained gray, but Bud's voice spoke a few words in the alien language. He stopped, the speaker clicked and the light went out. When it was plain that nothing more would occur and no announcement was to be made of what was said, the people in the room turned back to the windows, talk picked up again.

Somebody told a joke and laughed alone.

One of the linguists remained turned toward the loudspeaker, then looked at the widening patches of blue sky showing out the window, his expression puzzled. He had understood.

"It's dark," the thin Intelligence Department decoder translated, low-voiced, to the man from the _Times_. "Your atmosphere is _thick_. That's precisely what Bud said."

Another three minutes. The _Times_ caught himself about to light a cigarette and swore silently, blowing the match out and putting the cigarette back into its package. He listened for the sound of the rocket jets. It was time for the landing, yet he heard no blasts.

The green light came on in the transceiver.

Message in.

Instinctively he came to his feet. Nathen abruptly was standing beside him. Then the message came in the voice he was coming to think of as Bud. It spoke and paused. Suddenly the _Times_ knew.

"We've landed." Nathen whispered the words.

The wind blew across the open spaces of white concrete and damp soil that was the empty airfield, swaying the wet, shiny grass. The people in the room looked out, listening for the roar of jets, looking for the silver bulk of a spaceship in the sky.

Nathen moved, seating himself at the transmitter, switching it on to warm up, checking and balancing dials. Jacob Luke of the _Times_ moved softly to stand behind his right shoulder, hoping he could be useful. Nathen made a half motion of his head, as if to glance back at him, unhooked two of the earphone sets hanging on the side of the tall streamlined box that was the automatic translator, plugged them in and handed one back over his shoulder to the _Times_ man.

The voice began to come from the speaker again.

Hastily, Jacob Luke fitted the earphones over his ears. He fancied he could hear Bud's voice tremble. For a moment it was just Bud's voice speaking the alien language, and then, very distant and clear in his earphones, he heard the recorded voice of the linguist say an English word, then a mechanical click and another clear word in the voice of one of the other translators, then another as the alien's voice flowed from the loudspeaker, the cool single words barely audible, overlapping and blending with it like translating thought, skipping unfamiliar words, yet quite astonishingly clear.

"Radar shows no buildings or civilization near. The atmosphere around us registers as thick as glue. Tremendous gas pressure, low gravity, no light at all. You didn't describe it like this. Where are you, Joe?

This isn't some kind of trick, is it?" Bud hesitated, was prompted by a deeper official voice and jerked out the words.

"If it is a trick, we are ready to repel attack."

* * * * *

The linguist stood listening. He whitened slowly and beckoned the other linguists over to him and whispered to them.

Joseph Nathen looked at them with unwarranted bitter hostility while he picked up the hand-mike, plugging it into the translator. "Joe calling," he said quietly into it in clear, slow English. "No trick. We don't know where you are. I am trying to get a direction fix from your signal. Describe your surroundings to us if at all possible."

Nearby, the floodlights blazed steadily on the television platform, ready for the official welcome of the aliens to Earth. The television channels of the world had been alerted to set aside their scheduled programs for an unscheduled great event. In the long room the people waited, listening for the swelling sound of rocket jets.

This time, after the light came on, there was a long delay. The speaker sputtered, and sputtered again, building to a steady scratching they could barely sense as a dim voice. It came through in a few tinny words and then wavered back to inaudibility. The machine translated in their earphones.

"Tried ... seemed ... repair...." Suddenly it came in clearly. "Can't tell if the auxiliary blew, too. Will try it. We might pick you up clearly on the next try. I have the volume down. Where is the landing port? Repeat. Where is the landing port? Where are you?"

Nathen put down the hand-mike and carefully set a dial on the recording box, and flipped a switch, speaking over his shoulder. "This sets it to repeat what I said the last time. It keeps repeating." Then he sat with unnatural stillness, his head still half turned, as if he had suddenly caught a glimpse of answer and was trying with no success whatever to grasp it.

The green warning light cut in, the recording clicked and the playback of Bud's face and voice appeared on the screen.

"We heard a few words, Joe, and then the receiver blew again. We're adjusting a viewing screen to pick up the long waves that go through the murk and convert them to visible light. We'll be able to see out soon. The engineer says that something is wrong with the stern jets, and the captain has had me broadcast a help call to our nearest space base." He made the mouth O of a grin. "The message won't reach it for some years. I trust you, Joe, but get us out of here, will you?--They're buzzing that the screen is finally ready. Hold

everything."

* * * * *

The screen went gray, and the green light went off.

The _Times_ considered the lag required for the help call, the speaking and recording of the message just received, the time needed to reconvert a viewing screen.

"They work fast." He shifted uneasily, and added at random, "Something wrong with the time factor. All wrong. They work _too_ fast."

The green light came on again immediately. Nathen half turned to him, sliding his words hastily into the gap of time as the message was recorded and slowed. "They're close enough for our transmission power to blow their receiver."

If it was on Earth, why the darkness around the ship? "Maybe they see in the high ultra-violet--the atmosphere is opaque to that band," the _Times_ suggested hastily as the speaker began to talk in the young extraterrestrial's voice.

It _was_ shaking now. "Stand by for the description."

They tensed, waiting. The _Times_ brought a map of the state before his mind's eye.

"A half circle of cliffs around the horizon. A wide muddy lake swarming with swimming things. Huge, strange white foliage all around the ship and incredibly huge pulpy monsters attacking and eating each other on all sides. We almost landed in the lake, right on the soft edge. The mud can't hold the ship's weight, and we're sinking. The engineer says we might be able to blast free, but the tubes are mud-clogged and might blow up the ship. When can you reach us?"

The _Times_ thought vaguely of the Carboniferous Era. Nathen obviously had seen something he had not.

"Where are they?" the _Times_ asked him quietly.

Nathen pointed to the antenna position indicators. The _Times_ let his eyes follow the converging imaginary lines of focus out the window to the sunlit airfield, the empty airfield, the drying concrete and green waving grass where the lines met.

Where the lines met. The spaceship was there!

The fear of something unknown gripped him suddenly.

The spaceship was broadcasting again. "_Where are you? Answer if

possible! We are sinking! Where are you?_"

He saw that Nathen knew. "What is it?" the _Times_ asked hoarsely. "Are they in another dimension or the past or on another world or what?"

Nathen was smiling bitterly, and Jacob Luke remembered that the young man had a friend in that spaceship. "My guess is that they evolved on a high-gravity planet, with a thin atmosphere, near a blue-white star. Sure they see in the ultra-violet range. Our sun is abnormally small and dim and yellow. Our atmosphere is so thick, it screens out ultra-violet." He laughed harshly. "A good joke on us, the weird place we evolved in, the thing it did to us!"

"Where are you?" called the alien spaceship. "Hurry, please! We're sinking!"

* * * * *

The decoder slowed his tumbled, frightened words and looked up into the _Times'_ face for understanding. "We'll rescue them," he said quietly. "You were right about the time factor, right about them moving at a different speed. I misunderstood. This business about squawk coding, speeding for better transmission to counteract beam waver--I was wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"They don't speed up their broadcasts."

"They don't--?"

Suddenly, in his mind's eye, the _Times_ began to see again the play he had just seen--but the actors were moving at blurring speed, the words jerking out in a fluting, dizzying stream, thoughts and decisions passing with unfollowable rapidity, rippling faces in a twisting blur of expressions, doors slamming wildly, shatteringly, as the actors leaped in and out of rooms.

No--faster, faster--he wasn't visualizing it as rapidly as it was, an hour of talk and action in one almost instantaneous "squawk," a narrow peak of "noise" interfering with a single word in an Earth broadcast! Faster--faster--it was impossible. Matter could not stand such stress--inertia--momentum--abrupt weight.

It was insane. "Why?" he asked. "How?"

Nathen laughed again harshly, reaching for the mike. "Get them out? There isn't a lake or river within hundreds of miles from here!"

A shiver of unreality went down the _Times'_ spine. Automatically and inanely, he found himself delving in his pocket for a cigarette while he tried to grasp what had happened. "Where are they, then? Why can't

we see their spaceship?"

Nathen switched the microphone on in a gesture that showed the bitterness of his disappointment.

"We'll need a magnifying glass for that."



WIND RISING IN THE ALLEYS

From: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Sun-Up and Other Poems*, by Lola Ridge

Wind rising in the alleys
My spirit lifts in you like a banner streaming free of hot walls.
You are full of unspent dreams....
You are laden with beginnings....
There is hope in you... not sweet... acrid as blood in the mouth.
Come into my tossing dust
Scattering the peace of old deaths,
Wind rising in the alleys,
Carrying stuff of flame.



HENRY

From: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Men I'm Not Married To*, by Dorothy Parker
1922

You would really be surprised at the number of things that Henry knows just a shade more about than anybody else does. Naturally he can't help realizing this about himself, but you mustn't think for a minute that he has let it spoil him. On the contrary, as the French so well put it. He has no end of patience with others, and he is always willing to oversee what they are doing, and to offer them counsel. When it comes to giving his time and his energy there is nobody who could not admit that Henry is generous. To a fault, I have even heard people go so far as to say.

If, for instance, Henry happens to drop in while four of his friends are struggling along through a game of bridge he does not cut in and take a hand, thereby showing up their playing in comparison to his. No, Henry draws up a chair and sits looking on with a kindly smile. Of course, now and then he cannot restrain a look of pain or an exclamation of surprise or even a burst of laughter as he listens to the bidding, but he never interferes. Frequently, after a card has been played, he will lean over and in a good-humoured way tell the player what he should have done instead, and how he might just as well throw his hand down then and there, but he always refuses to take any more active part in the game. Occasionally, when a uniquely poisonous play is made, I have seen Henry thrust his chair aside and pace about in speechless excitement, but for the most part he is admirably self-controlled. He always leaves with a few cheery words to the players, urging them to keep at it and not let themselves get discouraged.

And that is the way Henry is about everything. He will stroll over to a tennis court, and stand on the side lines, at what I am sure must be great personal inconvenience, calling words of advice and suggestion for sets at a stretch. I have even known him to follow his friends all the way around a golf course, offering constructive criticism on their form as he goes. I tell you, in this day and generation, you don't find many

people who will go as far out of their way for their friends as Henry does. And I am far from being the only one who says so, too.

I have often thought that Henry must be the boy who got up the idea of leaving the world a little better than he found it. Yet he never crashes in on his friends' affairs. Only after the thing is done does he point out to you how it could have been done just a dash better. After you have signed the lease for the new apartment Henry tells you where you could have got one cheaper and sunnier; after you are all tied up with the new firm Henry explains to you where you made your big mistake in leaving the old one.

It is never any news to me when I hear people telling Henry that he knows more about more things than anybody they ever saw in their lives.

And I don't remember ever having heard Henry give them any argument on that one.



THE PARTY

From: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Neighborhood Stories*, by Zona Gale
1914

Mis' Fire Chief Merriman done her mourning like she done her house work--thorough. She was the kind of a housekeeper that looks on the week as made up of her duties, and the days not needing other names: Washday, Ironday, Mend-day, Bakeday, Freeday, Scrubday, and Sunday--that was how they went. With them nothing interfered without it was a circus or a convention or a company or the extra work on holidays. She kept house all over her, earnest; and when the Fire Chief died, that was the way she mourned.

When I say mourning I mean what you do besides the feeling bad part. She felt awful bad about her husband, but her mourning was somehow kind of separate from her grieving. Her grieving was done with her feelings, but her mourning was done more physical, like a diet. After the first year there was certain things she would and wouldn't do, count of mourning, and nothing could change them.

Weddings and funerals Mis' Fire Chief Merriman stayed true to. She would go to either. "Getting connect' or getting buried," she said, "them are both religious occasions, and they's somethin' so sad about either of

'em that they kind of fit in with weeds."

But she wouldn't go to a party if there was more than three or four to it, and not then if one of 'em was a stranger to her. And she wouldn't go to it unless it was to a house--picnics, where you sat around on the ground, she said, was too informal for them in mourning. Church meetings she went to, but not club meetings, except the Cemetery Improvement Sodality ones. It was like keeping track of etiquette to know what to do with Mis' Fire Chief Merriman.

"Seems though Aunt Hettie is more married now than she was when Uncle Eben was living," her niece use' to say.

It was on the little niece, Harriet Wells,--named for Mis' Chief and come to live with her a while before the Fire Chief died,--it was on her that Mis' Merriman's mourning etiquette fell the heaviest. Harriet was twenty and woman--pretty and beau-interested; and Amos More, that worked in Eppleby's feed store and didn't hev no folks, he'd been shining round the Merriman house some, and Harriet had been shining back, modest and low-wicked, but lit. He was spending mebbe a couple of evenings a week there and taking Harriet to sociables and entertainments some. But when the Fire Chief died Mis' Merriman set her foot down on Amos.

"I couldn't stand it," she says, "to hev a man comin' here that wasn't the Chief. I couldn't stand it to hev sparkin' an' courtin' goin' on all around me. An' if I should hev to hev a weddin' got ready for in this house--the dressmakin' an' like that--I believe I should scream."

So Amos he give up going there and just went flocking around by himself, and Harriet, she give all her time to her aunt, looking like a little lonesome candle that nothing answered back to. And Mis' Merriman's mourning flourished like a green bay tree.

It was into this state of affairs, more than a year after the Chief died, that Mis' Merriman's cousin's letter come. Mis' Merriman's cousin had always been one of them myth folks that every town has--the relations and friends of each other that is talked about and known about and heard from and even asked after, but that none of us ever sees. This cousin, Maria Carpenter, was one of our most intimate myths. Next to the Fire Chief himself, Mis' Merriman give the most of her time in conversation to her. She was real dressy--she used to send Mis' Merriman samples of her clothes and their trimmings, and we all felt real well acquainted and interested; and she was rich and busy and from the city, and the kind of a relation it done Mis' Merriman good to have connected with her, and her photograph with a real lace collar was on the parlor mantel. She had never been to Friendship Village, and we used to wonder why not.

And then she got the word that her cousin was actually flesh-an'-blood coming. I run in to Mis' Merriman's on my way home from town just after Harriet had brought her up the letter, and Mis' Merriman was all of a

heap in the big chair.

“Calliope,” she says, “the blow is down! Maria Carpenter is a-comin’ Tuesday to stay till Friday.”

“Well,” I says, “ain’t you glad, Mis’ Fire Chief? Company ain’t no great chore now the telephone is in,” I says to calm her.

She looked up at me, sad, over her glasses.

“What good is it to have her come?” she says. “I can’t show her off. There won’t be a livin’ place I can take her to. Nobody’ll see her nor none of her clothes.”

“It’s too bad,” I says absent, “it didn’t happen so’s you could give a company for Miss Carpenter.”

Mis’ Fire Chief burst out like her feelings overflowed themselves.

“It’s what I’ve always planned,” she says. “Many a night I’ve laid awake an’ thought about the company I’d give when Maria come. An’ Maria never could come. An’ now here is Maria all but upon me, an’ the company can’t be. I know she’ll bring a dress, expectin’ it. She knows it’s past the first year, an’ she’ll think I’ll feel free to entertain. I donno but I ought to telegraph her: _Pleased to see you but don’t you expect a company._ Wouldn’t that be more open an’ aboveboard? Oh, dear!” Mis’ Fire Chief says, rockin’ in her chair that wouldn’t rock, “I’m well an’ the house is all in order an’ I could afford a company if I didn’t go in deep. But I couldn’t bear to be to it. That’s it, Calliope; I couldn’t bear to be to it.”

I remember Mis’ Fire Chief kind of stopped then, like she thought of something; but I wasn’t looking at her. I was watching Harriet Wells that was standing by the window a little to one side. And I see her lift her hand and give it a little wave and lay it on the glass like a signal to somebody. And all of a sudden I knew it was half past ’leven and that Amos More went home early to his dinner at the boarding house so’s to get back at twelve-thirty, when Eppleby went for his, and that nine to ten it was Amos that Harriet was waving at. I knew it special and sure when Harriet turned back to the room with a nice little guilty look and a pink spot up high on both her cheeks. And something sort o’ shut up in my throat. It seems so easy for folks to get married in this world, and here was these two not doing it.

All of a sudden Mis’ Fire Chief Merriman jumped up on to her feet.

“Calliope Marsh,” says she, “I’ve got a plan. I can do it, if you’ll help me. Why can’t I give a company,” she says, “an’ not come in the room? A hostess has to be in the kitchen most of the time anyway. Why can’t I just stay there, an’ leave Maria be in the parlor, an’ me not be to the company at all?”

We talked it over, and neither of us see why not. Mis' Sykes, when she gives her series of companies, three in three days running, she often don't set foot in the parlor till after the refreshments are served. I remember once she was so faint she had to go back to the kitchen and eat her own supper, and we didn't say good-by to her at all, except as some of us that knew her best went and stuck our heads out the kitchen door. So with all us ladies--we done the same way when we entertained, so be we give 'em any kind of a lay-out.

"I won't say anything about the party bein' for Maria, one way or the other," she says; "I won't make a spread about it, nor much of an event. I'll just send out invites for a quiet time. Then when they come, you can stay in the room with Maria at first an' get her introduced. An' after that the party can go ahead on its own legs, just as well without me as with me. I could only fly in now an' then anyhow, an' talk to 'em snatchy, with my mind on the supper. Why ain't it just as good to stay right out of it altogether?"

We see it reasonable. And a couple of days before Maria Carpenter was expected, Mis' Fire Chief, she went to work, Harriet helping her, and she got her invitations out. They was on some black bordered paper and envelopes that Mis' Fire Chief had had for a mourning Christmas present an' had been saving. And they was worded real delicate, like Mis' Fire Chief done everything:

Mrs. Merriman, At Home, Thursday afternoon, Four o'clock Sharp,
Thimbles. Six o'clock Supper. Walk right in past the bell.

It made quite a little stir in Friendship Village, because Mis' Merriman hadn't been anywheres yet. But everybody took it all right. And anyway, everybody was too busy getting ready, to bother much over anything else. It's quite a problem to know what to wear to a winter company in Friendship Village. Nobody entertains much of any in the winter--its a chore to get the parlor cleaned and het, and it's cold for 'em to lay off their things, and you can't think up much that's tasty for refreshments, being it's too cold to give 'em ice cream. Mis' Fire Chief was giving the party on the afternoon of Miss Carpenter's three o'clock arrival, in the frank an' public hope that somebody would dance around during her stay and give her a return invite out to tea or somewheres.

The morning of the day that was the day, there come a rap to my door while I was stirring up my breakfast, and there was Harriet Wells, bare-headed and a shawl around her, and looking summer-sweet in her little pink muslin dressing sacque that matched her cheeks and showed off her blue eyes.

"Aunt Hettie wants to know," she says, "whether you can't come over now so's to get an early start. She's afraid the train'll get in before we're ready for it."

"Land!" I says, "I know how she feels. The last company I give I got up and swep' by lamplight and had my cake all in the oven by 6 A.M. Come in while I eat my breakfast and I'll run right back with you and leave my dishes setting. How's your aunt standing it?" I ask' her.

"Oh, pretty well, thank you," says Hettie, "but she's awful nervous. She hasn't et for two days--not since the invitations went out o' the house--an' last night she dreamt about the Chief. That always upsets her an' makes her cross all next day."

"If she wasn't your aunt," I says, "I'd say, 'Deliver me from loving the dead so strong that I'm ugly to the living.' But she is your aunt and a good woman--so I'm mum as you please."

Hettie, she sighs some. "She is a good woman," she says, wistful; "but, oh, Mis' Marsh, they's some good women that it's terrible hard to live with," she says--an' then she choked up a little because she had said it. But I, and all Friendship Village, knew it for the truth. And we all wanted to be delivered from people that's so crazy to be moral and proper themselves, in life or in mourning, that they walk over everybody else's rights and stomp down everybody's feelin's. My eyes filled up when I looked at that poor, lonesome little thing, sacrificed like she was to Mis' Fire Chief's mourning spree.

"Hettie," I says, "Amos More goes by here every morning about now on his way to his work. When he goes by this morning, want to know what I'm going to tell him?"

"Yes'm," says Hettie, simple, blushing up like a pink lamp shade when you've lit the lamp.

"I'm a-goin' to tell him," says I, "that I'm going to ask Eppleby Holcomb to let him off for a couple of ours or so this morning, an' a couple more this afternoon. I want he should come over to Mis' Fire Chief's an' chop ice an help turn freezer." (We was going to feed 'em ice cream even if it was winter.) "I'm getting too old for such fancy jobs myself, and you ain't near strong enough, and Mis' Chief, I know how she'll be. She won't reco'nize her own name by nine o'clock."

While I was finding out what cocoanut and raisins and such they'd got in stock, along come Amos More, hands hanging loose like he'd lost his grip on something. I called to him, and pretended not to notice Harriet's little look into the clock-door looking-glass, and when he come in I 'most forgot what I'd meant to say to him, it was so nice to see them two together. I never see two more in love with every look of each other's.

"Why, Harriet!" says Amos, as if saying her name was his one way of breathing.

"Good mornin', Amos," Harriet says, rose-pink and looking at the back of

her hand.

Amos just give me a little nice smile, and then he didn't seem to know I was in the room. He went straight up to her and caught a-hold of the fringe of her shawl.

"Harriet," he says, "how long have I got to go on livin' on the sight of you through that dinin'-room window? Yes, livin'. It's the only time I'm alive all day long--just when I see you there, signalin' me--an' when I know you ain't forgot. But I can't go on this way--I can't, I can't."

"What can I do--what can I do, Amos?" she says, faint.

"Do? Chuck everything for me--if you love me enough," says Amos, neat as a recipe.

"I owe Aunt Hettie too much," says Hettie, firm; "I ain't that kind--to turn on her ungrateful."

"I know it. I love you for that too," says Amos, "I love you on account of everything you do. And I tell you I can't live like this much longer."

"Well said!" I broke in, brisk; "I can help you over this day anyhow. You go on down-town, Amos, and get the stuff on this list I've made out, and then you come on up to Mis' Fire Chief's. We need a man and we need you. I'll fix it with Eppleby."

They wasn't any need to explain to Mis' Fire Chief. She was so excited she didn't know whether she was a-foot or a-horseback. When Amos got back with the things I'd sent for she didn't seem half to sense it was him I was sending out in the woodshed to chop ice. She didn't hev her collar on nor her shoes buttoned, and she wasn't no more use in that kitchen than a dictionary.

"Oh, Calliope," she says, in a sort of wail, "I'm so nervous!"

"You go and set down, Mis' Fire Chief," says I, "and button up your shoes. I've got every move of the morning planned out," says I, "so be you don't interrupt me."

Of course it was her party and all, but they's some hostesses you hev to lay a firm holt of, if you're the helper and expect the party to come off at all. And I never see any living hostess more upset than was Mis' Fire Chief. She give all the symptoms--not of a company, but of coming down with something.

"Oh, Calliope," says she, "everything's against me. I donno," she says, "but it's a sign from the Chief in his grave that I'm actin' against his wishes an' opposite to what widows should. The wood is green--hear it siss an' sizzle in that stove an' hold back its heat from me. The

cistern is dry--we've hed to pump water to the neighbors. Not a hen has cackled this livelong mornin' in the coop. The milkman couldn't only leave me three quarts instead of four, though ordered ahead. An' I feel like death--I feel like death," says she, "part on account of the Chief--ain't it like he was speakin' his disapprovin' in all these little minor ways?--an' part because I know I'm comin' down with a hard cold an' I'd ought to be in bed all lard an' pepper this livin' minute. Oh, dear me! An' Maria all but upon me. I don't know how I'll ever get through this day."

"Mis' Fire Chief," says I, "you go and lay down and try to get some rest."

"No, Calliope," says she, "the beds is all ready for the company to lay their hats off, an' the lounge pillows has been beat light on the line."

"Well," says I, "go off an' take a walk."

"Not without I walk to the cemetery," says she, "an' that I couldn't bear. Not to-day."

"Well," says I, "then you let me put a wet cloth over your head and eyes, and you set still and stop talkin'. You'll be wore to a thread," says I.

And that was what I done to her, expecting that if she didn't keep still I'd bake the ice cream and freeze the cake and lose my own head entire.

Out in the shed I'd set Amos to cracking ice, and Harriet to cracking nuts, with a flatiron and a hammer. And pretty soon I stepped along to see how things was going. Land, land, it was a pretty sight! They was both working away, but Amos was looking down at her more'n to his work, and Harriet was looking up at him like he was all of it--and the whole air was pleasant with something sweeter than could be named. So I left them two alone, well knowing that I could manage a company sole by myself yet a while, no matter how much courting and mourning was going on all around me.

And everything went fine, in spite of Mis' Fire Chief's looking like death in the rocker, with a wet rag on her brow.

But she kept lifting up one corner and giving directions.

"No pink frostin', Calliope, you know," she says, "only white. An' no colored flowers--only white ones. You'll have to write the place cards--my hand shakes so I don't dare trust myself. But I'll cut up the ribbin for the sandwiches--I can do that much," says she.

The place cards was mourning ones, with broad black edges, and the ribbin to tie up the sandwiches was black too. And the centerpiece was one Mis' Fire Chief and Hettie hed been up early that morning making--it

was a set piece from the Chief's funeral, a big goblet, turned bottom side up, done in white geraniums with "He is Near" in purple everlastings. The table was going to look real tasty, Mis' Fire Chief thought, all in black and white so--with little sprays of willow laid around on the cloth instead of ferns.

"I've done the best I could," she said, solemn, "to make the occasion do honor to Maria an' pay reverence to the Chief."

I had just finally persuaded her to go up-stairs and look the chambers over and then try to take a little rest somewheres around, when Amos come to the shed door to tell me the freezer wouldn't turn no more, and was it broke or was the cream froze. And Mis' Fire Chief, seeing him coming in the shed way, seemed to sense for the first time that he was there.

"Amos More," says she, "what you doin' here?"

"I ask' him," says I, hasty; "I had to have his help about the ice."

She covered her eyes with one hand. "Courtin' an' entertainin' goin' on in the Chief's house," she said, "an' him only just gone from us!"

"Well," s'I, "I've got to have _some_ man's help out here this afternoon--why not Amos's?"

"Oh," says Mis' Merriman, "you're all against me but the Chief, an' him helpless."

"The Chief," says I, "was always careful of your health. You'll make yourself sick taking on so, Mis' Fire Chief," I told her. "You go and put flowers in the chambers and leave the rest to me. Put your mind," I told her, "on the surprise you've got for your guests that's comin'--Maria Carpenter here and all! Besides," I couldn't help sticking in, "I donno as Amos is cold poison."

So we got her off up-stairs.

Maria Carpenter's train was due at 3:03, so she was just a-going to have the right time to get ready when the afternoon would begin, because in Friendship Village "sharp four" means four o'clock. I had left the sandwiches to make last thing, and I come back from my dinner towards three and tiptoes through the house so's not to disturb Mis' Fire Chief if she was resting, and I went into the pantry and begun cutting and spreading bread. I hadn't been there but a little while before the stair door into the kitchen opened and I heard Hettie come down, humming a little. But before I could sing out to her, the woodshed door opened too, and in come Amos that had been out putting more salt in the freezer.

"Hettie!" he says in a low voice, and I see she prob'ly hed on her white

muslin and was looking like angels, and more. And--“I won’t,” says Amos, then--“I won’t--though I can hardly keep my hands off from you--dear.”

“It don’t seem right even to have you call me ‘dear,’” says Hettie, sad.

Amos burst right out. “It is right--it is right!” says he. “They can’t nobody make me feel ‘dear’ is wicked, not when it means as dear as you are to me. Hettie,” Amos says, “sit down here a minute.”

“Not us. Not together,” says Hettie, nervous.

“Yes!” says Amos, commanding, “I don’t know when I’ll see you again. Set down here, by me.”

And by the little stillness, I judged she done so. And I says this: “Them poor things ain’t had ten minutes with each other in over a year, and if they know I’m here, that’ll spoil this time. I’d better stay where I am, still, with my thoughts on my sandwiches.” And that was what I done. But I couldn’t--I couldn’t--and neither could most anyone--of helped a word or two leaking through the pantry door and the sandwich thoughts.

“I just wanted to pretend--for a minute,” Amos said, “that this was our house. An’ our kitchen. An’ that we was settin’ here side of the stove an’ belonged.”

“Oh, Amos,” said Hettie, “it don’t seem right to pretend that way with Aunt Hettie’s stove--an’ her feelin’ the way she does.”

“Yes, it is right,” says Amos, stout. “Hettie! Don’t you see? She don’t feel that way. She’s just nervous with grievin’, an’ it comes out like that. She don’t care--really. At least not anything like the way she thinks she does. Now don’t let’s think about her, Hettie--dearest! Think about now. An’ let’s just pretend for a minute it was then. You know--then!”

“Well,” says Hettie, unwilling,--and yet, oh, so willing,--“if it was then, what would you be sayin’?”

“I’d be sayin’ what I say now,” says Amos, “an’ what I’ll say to the end o’ time: that I love you so much that the world ain’t the world without you. But I want to hear you say somethin’. What would you be sayin’, Hettie, if it was then?”

I knew how she dimpled up as she answered--Hettie’s dimples was like the wind had dented a rose leaf.

“I’d prob’ly be sayin’,” says Hettie, “Amos, you ain’t filled the water pail. An’ I’ll have to have another armful o’ kindlin’.”

“Well,” says Amos, “but then when I’d brought ’em. What would you say

then?"

"I'd say, 'What do you want for dinner?'" said Hettie, demure. But even this was too much for Amos.

"An' then we'd cook it," he says, almost reverent. "Oh, Hettie--don't it seem like heaven to think of us seein' to all them little things--together?"

I loved Hettie for her answer. Coquetting is all right some of the time; but--some of the time--so is real true talk.

"Yes," she says soft, "it does. But it seems like earth too--_an' I'm glad of it_."

"Oh, Hettie," says Amos, "marry me. Don't let's go on like this."

"Dear," says Hettie, all solemn,--and forgetting that "dear" was such a wicked word,--"dear, I'd marry you this afternoon if it wasn't for Aunt Hettie's feelin's. But I can't hurt her--I can't," she says.

Well, just then the door bell rung, and Hettie she flew to answer it, and Amos he lit back to the woodshed and went to chopping more ice like life lay all that way. And I was just coming out of the butt'ry with a pan of thin sandwiches ready for the black ribbins, when I heard a kind of groan and a scuffle, and down-stairs come Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, and all but fell into the kitchen. She had something in her hand.

"Calliope--Calliope Marsh," says she, all wailing like a bereavement, "Cousin Maria has fell an broke her wrist, an' she ain't comin' _at all_!"

I stood still, real staggered. I see what it meant to Mis' Merriman--invites all out, Cousin Maria for surprise and hostess in one, Mis' Merriman not figgering on appearing at all, account of the Chief, and the company right that minute on the way.

"What'll I do--what'll I _do_?" cries Mis' Merriman, sinking down on the bottom step in her best black with the crêpe cuffs. "Oh," she says, "it's a judgment upon me. I'll hev to turn my guests from my door. I'll be the laughing-stock," says she, wild.

And just then, like the trump of judgment to her, we heard the front door shut, and the first folks to come went marching up the stairs. And at the same minute Amos come in from the shed with the dasher out of the second freezer, and Hettie's eyes run to him like he was their goal and their home. And then I says:

"Mis' Fire Chief. Leave your company come in. Serve 'em the food of your house, just like you've got it ready. Stay back in the kitchen and don't go in the parlor and do it all just like you'd planned. And in place of

Maria Carpenter and the surprise you'd meant," says I, "give 'em another surprise. Leave Hettie and Amos be married in your parlor, like they want to be and like all Friendship Village wants to see 'em. Couldn't nothing be sweeter."

Mis' Merriman stared up to me, and set and rocked.

"A weddin'," she says, "a weddin' in the parlor where the very last gatherin' was the funeral of the Chief? It's sacrilege--sacrilege!" she says, wild.

"Mis' Merriman," I says, simple, "what do you reckon this earth is about? What," says I, "is the purpose the Lord God Most High created it for out of nothing? As near as I can make out," I told her, "and I've give the matter some study, He's got a purpose hid way deep in His heart, and way deep in the hearts of us all has got to be the same purpose, or we might just as well, and a good sight better, be dead. And a part of that purpose is to keep His world a-going, and that can't be done, as I see it, by looking back over our shoulders to the dead that's gone, however dear, and forgetting the living that's all around us, yearning and thirsting and passioning for their happiness. And a part of His purpose is to put happiness into this world, so's people can brighten up and hearten out and do the work of the world like He meant 'em to. And you, Mis' Merriman," says I, plain, "are a-holding back from both them purposes of God's, and a-doing your best to set 'em to naught."

Mis' Merriman, she looked up kind of dazed from where she was a-sitting. "I ain't never supposed I was livin' counter to the Almighty," she says, some stiff.

"Well," says I, "none of us supposes that as much as we'd ought to. And my notion, and the notion of most of Friendship Village, it's just what you're doing, Mis' Fire Chief," says I, "in some respec's."

"Oh, even if I wasn't, I don't want to be the laughin'-stock to-day," says she, weak, and beginning to cry.

"Hettie and Amos," says I, then, for form's sake, "if Mis' Merriman agrees to this, do you agree?"

"Yes! Oh, _yes_!" says Amos, like the organ and the benediction and the Amen, all rolled into one.

"Yes," says Hettie, shy as a rose, but yet like a rose nodding on its stalk, positive.

"And you, Mis' Fire Chief?" says I.

She nodded behind her hands that covered up her face. "I don't know what to do," says she, faint. "Go on ahead--all of you!"

My, if we didn't have to fly around. They wasn't no time for dress changing. Hettie was in white muslin and Amos in every-day, but it was all right because she was Hettie and because he looked like a king in anything. And they was so many last things to do that none of us thought of dress anyhow. It was four o'clock by then, and folks had been stomping in "past the bell" and marching up-stairs and laying off their things--being as everybody knows what's what in Friendship Village and don't hev to be told where to go, same as some--till, judging by the sound, they had all got there and was clacking in the parlor, and Mis' Fire Chief's party had begun. And Mis' Fire Chief herself revived enough to offer to tie the ribbins around the sandwiches.

"My land!" I says, "we can't do that. We can't have black ribbin round the wedding sandwiches."

But Hettie, she broke in, sweet and dignified, and before her aunt could say a word. "Yes, we can," she says, "yes, we can. I ain't superstitious, same as some. Uncle's centerpiece an' his willow on the tablecloth an' his blackribbin sandwiches," says she, "is goin' to stay just the way they are, weddin' or no weddin'," says she. "Ain't they, Amos?" she ask' him.

"You bet you," says Amos, fervent, just like he would have agreed to anything under heaven that Hettie said. And Mis' Merriman, she looked at 'em then, grateful and even resigned. And time Amos had gone and got back with the license and the minister we were all ready.

They sent me in to sort of pave the way. I slips in through the hall and stood in the door a minute wondering how I'd tell 'em. There they all was, setting sewing and rocking and gossiping, contented as if they had a hostess in every room. And not one of 'em suspecting. Oh, I loved 'em one and all, and I loved the way they was all _used_ to each other, and talking natural about crochet patterns and recipes for oatmeal cookies and what's good to keep hands from chapping--not one of 'em putting on or setting their best foot forwards or trying to act their best, same as they might with company, but just being themselves, natural and forgetting. And I was glad, deep down in my heart, that Maria Carpenter hadn't come near. Not glad that she had broke her wrist, of course--but that she hadn't come near. And when I stepped out to tell 'em what was going to happen, I was so glad in my throat that I couldn't say a word only just--

"Friends--listen to me. What do you _s'pose_ is goin' to happen? Oh, they can't none of you guess. So look. Look!"

Then I threw open the dining-room door and let 'em in--Hettie and Amos, with Doctor June. And patterns and recipes and lotions all just simmered down into one surprised and glad and loving buzz of wonder. And then Hettie and Amos were married, and the world begun all over again, Garden of Eden style.

There is one little thing more to tell. When the congratulations was most over, the dining-room door creaked a little bit, and Amos, that was standing by it, whirled around and see Mis' Fire Chief Merriman peeking through the crack to her guests. And Amos swung open the door wide, and he grabbed her by the arm, and though she hung back with all her strength Amos pulled her right straight into the room and kissed her, there before them all.

"_Aunt_ Hettie," he says to her, ringing, "_Uncle_ --Hettie's uncle an' mine an' your husband, --wouldn't want you stayin' out there in the dinin'-room to-day on account o' him!"

And when we all crowded around her, greeting her like guests should greet a hostess and like dear friends should greet dear friends, Mis' Fire Chief she wipes her eyes, and she left 'em shake her hands; and though she wasn't all converted, it was her and not me that ask' 'em please to walk out into the dining-room and eat the lunch that was part wedding and part in memory of the Chief.



A ROSE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Poems*, by Iris Tree

What do you ask of me with your beauty, what are you urging
Of labour and painful aspiring to flatter your perfection?
What secretness of love with terrible blushes surging
Unseen, have found in you at last their passionate reflection?

What dreams that lovers knew, as sleep with subtle magic
Tore off the rags of life and made her dance with body spangled,
Drew back the vacant hours, the tedious and the tragic,
And showed the glittering souls from bodies we had mangled;--

What visions made you, emblem of longing and love that has died
unrequited,
And all lost joys, and tears, and beauty passionately given,
Winked at by folly, skewered by the butcher, danced on and
slighted,
That now spring up from death, showing their slayers the colours of
Heaven?

You have burst from the ground with your joy, you are pining and
bleeding,
Your scent is heavy with sorrowful love; oh, memories clinging,
What do you ask of my soul with such fierceness of pleading,

I that was glad to forget ... What do you need of my singing?

1916



THE SNOW.

Project Gutenberg's *Poems: Three Series, Complete*, by Emily Dickinson

It sifts from leaden sieves,
It powders all the wood,
It fills with alabaster wool
The wrinkles of the road.

It makes an even face
Of mountain and of plain, --
Unbroken forehead from the east
Unto the east again.

It reaches to the fence,
It wraps it, rail by rail,
Till it is lost in fleeces;
It flings a crystal veil

On stump and stack and stem, --
The summer's empty room,
Acres of seams where harvests were,
Recordless, but for them.

It ruffles wrists of posts,
As ankles of a queen, --
Then stills its artisans like ghosts,
Denying they have been.



TRIFLES

A PLAY

By Susan Glaspell

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1920

TRIFLES was first produced by the Provincetown Players, at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, Mass., on August 8th, 1916, with the following cast:

GEORGE HENDERSON _Robert Rogers_.
HENRY PETERS _Robert Conville_.
LEWIS HALE _George Cram Cook_.
MRS. PETERS _Alice Hall_.
MRS. HALE _Susan Glaspell_.

It was later produced by the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre, New York City, on the night of November 15th, 1916, with the following cast:

GEORGE HENDERSON _T. W. Gibson_.
HENRY PETERS _Arthur E. Hohl_.
LEWIS HALE _John King_.
MRS. PETERS _Marjorie Vonnegut_.
MRS. HALE _Elinor M. Cox_.

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TRIFLES

A PLAY BY SUSAN GLASPELL

[SCENE: _The kitchen in the now abandoned farm-house of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order--unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table--other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the Sheriff comes in followed by the County Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are men in middle life, the County Attorney is a young man; all are

much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women--the Sheriff's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_rubbing his hands_]. This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS. PETERS [_after taking a step forward_]. I'm not--cold.

SHERIFF [_unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business_]. Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF [_looking about_]. It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us--no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove--and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF. Oh--yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy--I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by to-day and as long as I went over everything here myself--

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Well, Mr. Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE. Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone." I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet--I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John--

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE. I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it

was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say "Come in." I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door--this door [_ indicating the door by which the two women are still standing_] and there in that rocker--[_ pointing to it_] sat Mrs. Wright.

[_ They all look at the rocker._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. What--was she doing?

HALE. She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of--pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And how did she--look?

HALE. Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How do you mean--queer?

HALE. Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE. Why, I don't think she minded--one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said "Is it?"--and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she--laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "Cause he's dead," says she. "_Dead_?" says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why--where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs--like that [_ himself pointing to the room above_]. I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here--then I says, "Why, what did he die of?" "He died of a rope round his neck," says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might--need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'----

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE. Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked... [_ Stops, his face twitches._] ... but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, "No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything." So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. "Has

anybody been notified?" I asked. "No," says he, unconcerned. "Who did this, Mrs. Wright?" said Harry. He said it business-like--and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. "I don't know," she says. "You don't _know_?" says Harry. "No," says she. "Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?" says Harry. "Yes," says she, "but I was on the inside." "Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?" says Harry. "I didn't wake up," she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, "I sleep sound." Harry was going to ask her more questions, but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE. She moved from that chair to this over here.... [_ Pointing to a small chair in the corner.] ... and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me--scared. [_ The County Attorney, who has had his notebook out, makes a note.] I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_ looking around _]. I guess we'll go upstairs first--and then out to the barn and around there. [_ To the Sheriff. _] You're convinced that there was nothing important here--nothing that would point to any motive?

SHERIFF. Nothing here but kitchen things.

[_ The County Attorney, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Here's a nice mess.

[_ The women draw nearer._]

MRS. PETERS [_ to the other woman _]. Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. [_ To the Lawyer. _] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF. Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE. Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[_The two women move a little closer together._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_with the gallantry of a young politician_]. And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? [_The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place._] Dirty towels! [_Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink._] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS. HALE [_stiffly_]. There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. To be sure. And yet.... [_With a little bow to her._] ... I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels.

[_He gives it a pull to expose its full length again._]

MRS. HALE. Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS. HALE [_shaking her head_]. I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house--it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS. HALE. I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then--

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes--?

MRS. HALE [_looking about_]. It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No--it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS. HALE. No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerful for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now.

[_He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door._]

SHERIFF. I suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs. Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mr. Henderson.

[_The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen._]

MRS. HALE. I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing.

[_She arranges the pans under sink which the Lawyer had shoved out of place._]

MRS. PETERS. Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS. HALE. Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. [_Gives the roller towel a pull._] Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS. PETERS [_who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan_]. She had bread set. [_Stands still._]

MRS. HALE [_eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it._] She was going to put this in there. [_Picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things._] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [_Gets up on the chair and looks._] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes-~~here~~; [_Holding it toward the window._] this is cherries, too. [_Looking again._] I declare I believe that's the only one. [_Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside._] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

[_She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room, front table. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth._]

MRS. PETERS. Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. [She goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back._] You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them.

[They go in the other room; reappear, Mrs. Peters carrying a dress and skirt, Mrs. Hale following with a pair of shoes._]

MRS. PETERS. My, it's cold in there.

[She puts the cloth on the big table, and hurries to the stove._]

MRS. HALE [examining the skirt_]. Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies' Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that--oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS. PETERS. She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. [Opens stair door and looks._] Yes, here it is.

[Quickly shuts door leading upstairs._]

MRS. HALE [abruptly moving toward her_]. Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Do you think she did it?

MRS. PETERS [in a frightened voice_]. Oh, I don't know.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS. PETERS [starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice_]. Mr. Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS. HALE. Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS. PETERS. No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a--funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS. HALE. That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS. PETERS. Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or--sudden feeling.

MRS. HALE [_who is standing by the table_]. Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. [_She puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy._] It's wiped here. [_Makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the bread-box. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things._] Wonder how they are finding things upstairs? I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of _sneaking_. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS. PETERS. But, Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

MRS. HALE. I s'pose 'tis. [_Unbuttoning her coat._] Better loosen up your things, Mrs. Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

[_Mrs. Peters takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table._]

MRS. PETERS. She was piecing a quilt.

[_She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces._]

MRS. HALE. It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

[_Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The Sheriff enters, followed by Hale and the County Attorney._]

SHERIFF. They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it.

[_The men laugh, the women look abashed._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_rubbing his hands over the stove_]. Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up.

[_The men go outside._]

MRS. HALE [_resentfully_]. I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. [_She sits down at the big table smoothing out a block of decision._] I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS. PETERS [_apologetically_]. Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

[_Pulls up a chair and joins Mrs. Hale at the table._]

MRS. HALE [_examining another block_]. Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

[_After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant Mrs. Hale has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing._]

MRS. PETERS. Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE [_mildly_]. Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [_Threading a needle._] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS. PETERS [_nervously_]. I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS. HALE. I'll just finish up this end. [_Suddenly stopping and leaning forward._] Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS. PETERS. Oh--I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. [_Mrs. Hale starts to say something, looks at Mrs. Peters, then goes on sewing._] Well, I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. [_Putting apron and other things together._] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS. HALE. In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS. PETERS [_looking in cupboard_]. Why, here's a bird-cage. [_Holds it up._] Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Why, I don't know whether she did or not--I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS. PETERS [_glancing around_]. Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why should she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it?

MRS. HALE. I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS. PETERS. No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats--being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS. HALE. My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS. PETERS [_examining the cage_]. Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS. HALE [_looking too_]. Looks as if some one must have been rough with it.

MRS. PETERS. Why, yes.

[_She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table._]

MRS. HALE. I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS. PETERS. But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS. HALE. It would, wouldn't it? [_Dropping her sewing._] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over some times when _she_ was here. I--[_Looking around the room._]--wish I had.

MRS. PETERS. But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale--your house and your children.

MRS. HALE. I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful--and that's why I ought to have come. I--I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now--

[_Shakes her head._]

MRS. PETERS. Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until--something comes up.

MRS. HALE. Not having children makes less work--but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS. HALE. Yes--good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him. [_Shivers._] Like a raw wind that

gets to the bone. [_ Pauses, her eye falling on the cage._] I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS. PETERS. I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[_ She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it._]

MRS. HALE. You weren't raised round here, were you? [_ Mrs. Peters shakes her head._] You didn't know--her?

MRS. PETERS. Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS. HALE. She--come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself--real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and--fluttery. How--she--did--change. [_ Silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to every day things._] Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS. PETERS. Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here--and her things.

[_ They look in the sewing basket._]

MRS. HALE. Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. [_ Brings out a fancy box._] What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. [_ Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose._] Why--[_ Mrs. Peters bends nearer, then turns her face away._] There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS. PETERS. Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS. HALE [_ lifting the silk_]. Oh, Mrs. Peters--it's--

[_ Mrs. Peters bends closer._]

MRS. PETERS. It's the bird.

MRS. HALE [_ jumping up_]. But, Mrs. Peters--look at it. Its neck! Look at its neck! It's all--other side _to_.

MRS. PETERS. Somebody--wrung--its neck.

[_ Their eyes met. A look of growing comprehension of horror. Steps are heard outside. Mrs. Hale slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter Sheriff and County Attorney. Mrs. Peters rises._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries_]. Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS. PETERS. We think she was going to--knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. [_Seeing the bird-cage._] Has the bird flown?

MRS. HALE [_putting more quilt pieces over the box_]. We think the--cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_preoccupied_]. Is there a cat?

[_Mrs. Hale glances in a quick covert way at Mrs. Peters._]

MRS. PETERS. Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_to Sheriff Peters, continuing an interrupted conversation_]. No sign at all of any one having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. [_They start upstairs._] It would have to have been some one who knew just the----

[_Mrs. Peters sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it._]

MRS. HALE. She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS. PETERS [_in a whisper_]. When I was a girl--my kitten--there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes--and before I could get there----[_Covers her face an instant._] If they hadn't held me back I would have--[_Catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly_]--hurt him.

MRS. HALE [_with a slow look around her_]. I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. [_Pause._] No, Wright wouldn't like the bird--a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS. PETERS [_moving uneasily_]. We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS. HALE. I knew John Wright.

MRS. PETERS. It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS. HALE. His neck. Choked the life out of him.

[Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.]

MRS. PETERS [with rising voice]. We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

MRS. HALE [her own feeling not interrupted]. If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful--still, after the bird was still.

MRS. PETERS [something within her speaking]. I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died--after he was two years old, and me with no other then----

MRS. HALE [moving]. How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

MRS. PETERS. I know what stillness is. [Pulling herself back.] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale.

MRS. HALE [not as if answering that]. I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [A look around the room.] Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while? That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS. PETERS [looking upstairs]. We mustn't--take on.

MRS. HALE. I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be--for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things--it's all just a different kind of the same thing. [Brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it.] If I was you I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it ain't. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She--she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS. PETERS [takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice]. My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a--dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with--with--wouldn't they laugh!

[The men are heard coming down stairs.]

MRS. HALE [under her breath]. Maybe they would--maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was

some definite thing. Something to show--something to make a story about--a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it.

[_The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter Hale from outer door._]

HALE. Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'm going to stay here a while by myself. [_To the Sheriff._] You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF. Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

[_The Lawyer goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. [_Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back._] No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not--just that way.

SHERIFF [_chuckling_]. Married to the law. [_Moves toward the other room._] I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_scoffingly_]. Oh, windows!

SHERIFF. We'll be right out, Mr. Hale.

[_Hale goes outside. The Sheriff follows the County Attorney into the other room. Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter County Attorney and Sheriff._]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [_facetiously_]. Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS. HALE [_her hand against her pocket_]. We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson.

[_Curtain._]



THE BOOKKEEPER'S WIFE

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Nobody but the janitor was stirring about the offices of the Remsen Paper Company, and still Percy Bixby sat at his desk, crouched on his high stool and staring out at the tops of the tall buildings flushed with the winter sunset, at the hundreds of windows, so many rectangles of white electric light, flashing against the broad waves of violet that ebbed across the sky. His ledgers were all in their places, his desk was in order, his office coat on its peg, and yet Percy's smooth, thin face wore the look of anxiety and strain which usually meant that he was behind in his work. He was trying to persuade himself to accept a loan from the company without the company's knowledge. As a matter of fact, he had already accepted it. His books were fixed, the money, in a black-leather bill-book, was already inside his waistcoat pocket.

He had still time to change his mind, to rectify the false figures in his ledger, and to tell Stella Brown that they couldn't possibly get married next month. There he always halted in his reasoning, and went back to the beginning.

The Remsen Paper Company was a very wealthy concern, with easy, old-fashioned working methods. They did a longtime credit business with safe customers, who never thought of paying up very close on their large indebtedness. From the payments on these large accounts Percy had taken a hundred dollars here and two hundred there until he had made up the thousand he needed. So long as he stayed by the books himself and attended to the mail-orders he couldn't possibly be found out. He could move these little shortages about from account to account indefinitely. He could have all the time he needed to pay back the deficit, and more time than he needed.

Although he was so far along in one course of action, his mind still clung resolutely to the other. He did not believe he was going to do it. He was the least of a sharper in the world. Being scrupulously honest even in the most trifling matters was a pleasure to him. He was the sort of young man that Socialists hate more than they hate capitalists. He loved his desk, he loved his books, which had no handwriting in them but his own. He never thought of resenting the

fact that he had written away in those books the good red years between twenty-one and twenty-seven. He would have hated to let any one else put so much as a pen-scratch in them. He liked all the boys about the office; his desk, worn smooth by the sleeves of his alpaca coat; his rulers and inks and pens and calendars. He had a great pride in working economics, and he always got so far ahead when supplies were distributed that he had drawers full of pencils and pens and rubber bands against a rainy day.

Percy liked regularity: to get his work done on time, to have his half-day off every Saturday, to go to the theater Saturday night, to buy a new necktie twice a month, to appear in a new straw hat on the right day in May, and to know what was going on in New York. He read the morning and evening papers coming and going on the elevated, and preferred journals of approximate reliability. He got excited about ballgames and elections and business failures, was not above an interest in murders and divorce scandals, and he checked the news off as neatly as he checked his mail-orders. In short, Percy Bixby was like the model pupil who is satisfied with his lessons and his teachers and his holidays, and who would gladly go to school all his life. He had never wanted anything outside his routine until he wanted Stella Brown to marry him, and that had upset everything.

It wasn't, he told himself for the hundredth time, that she was extravagant. Not a bit of it. She was like all girls. Moreover, she made good money, and why should she marry unless she could better herself? The trouble was that he had lied to her about his salary. There were a lot of fellows rushing Mrs. Brown's five daughters, and they all seemed to have fixed on Stella as first choice and this or that one of the sisters as second. Mrs. Brown thought it proper to drop an occasional hint in the presence of these young men to the effect that she expected Stella to "do well." It went without saying that hair and complexion like Stella's could scarcely be expected to do poorly. Most of the boys who went to the house and took the girls out in a bunch to dances and movies seemed to realize this. They merely wanted a whirl with Stella before they settled down to one of her sisters. It was tacitly understood that she came too high for them. Percy had sensed all this through those slumbering instincts which awake in us all to befriend us in love or in danger.

But there was one of his rivals, he knew, who was a man to be reckoned with. Charley Greengay was a young salesman who wore tailor-made clothes and spotted waistcoats, and had a necktie for every day in the month. His air was that of a young man who is out for things that come high and who is going to get them. Mrs. Brown was ever and again dropping a word before Percy about how the girl that took Charley would have her flat furnished by the best furniture people, and her china-closet stocked with the best ware, and would have nothing to worry about but nicks and scratches. It was because he felt himself pitted against this pulling power of Greengay's that Percy had brazenly lied to Mrs. Brown, and told her

that his salary had been raised to fifty a week, and that now he wanted to get married.

When he threw out this challenge to Mother Brown, Percy was getting thirty-five dollars a week, and he knew well enough that there were several hundred thousand young men in New York who would do his work as well as he did for thirty.

These were the factors in Percy's present situation. He went over them again and again as he sat stooping on his tall stool. He had quite lost track of time when he heard the janitor call good night to the watchman. Without thinking what he was doing, he slid into his overcoat, caught his hat, and rushed out to the elevator, which was waiting for the janitor. The moment the car dropped, it occurred to him that the thing was decided without his having made up his mind at all. The familiar floors passed him, ten, nine, eight, seven. By the time he reached the fifth, there was no possibility of going back; the click of the drop-lever seemed to settle that. The money was in his pocket. Now, he told himself as he hurried out into the exciting clamor of the street, he was not going to worry about it any more.

* * * * *

When Percy reached the Browns' flat on 123d Street that evening he felt just the slightest chill in Stella's greeting. He could make that all right, he told himself, as he kissed her lightly in the dark three-by-four entrance-hall. Percy's courting had been prosecuted mainly in the Bronx or in winged pursuit of a Broadway car. When he entered the crowded sitting-room he greeted Mrs. Brown respectfully and the four girls playfully. They were all piled on one couch, reading the continued story in the evening paper, and they didn't think it necessary to assume more formal attitudes for Percy. They looked up over the smeary pink sheets of paper, and handed him, as Percy said, the same old jolly:

"Hullo, Perc'! Come to see me, ain't you? So flattered!"

"Any sweet goods on you, Perc'? Anything doing in the bong-bong line to-night?"

"Look at his new neckwear! Say, Perc', remember me. That tie would go lovely with my new tailored waist."

"Quit your kiddin', girls!" called Mrs. Brown, who was drying shirt-waists on the dining-room radiator. "And, Percy, mind the rugs when you're steppin' round among them gum-drops."

Percy fired his last shot at the recumbent figures, and followed Stella into the dining-room, where the table and two large easy-chairs formed, in Mrs. Brown's estimation, a proper background

for a serious suitor.

"I say, Stell'," he began as he walked about the table with his hands in his pockets, "seems to me we ought to begin buying our stuff." She brightened perceptibly. "Ah," Percy thought, "so that _was_ the trouble!" "To-morrow's Saturday; why can't we make an afternoon of it?" he went on cheerfully. "Shop till we're tired, then go to Houtin's for dinner, and end up at the theater."

As they bent over the lists she had made of things needed, Percy glanced at her face. She was very much out of her sisters' class and out of his, and he kept congratulating himself on his nerve. He was going in for something much too handsome and expensive and distinguished for him, he felt, and it took courage to be a plunger. To begin with, Stella was the sort of girl who had to be well dressed. She had pale primrose hair, with bluish tones in it, very soft and fine, so that it lay smooth however she dressed it, and pale-blue eyes, with blond eyebrows and long, dark lashes. She would have been a little too remote and languid even for the fastidious Percy had it not been for her hard, practical mouth, with lips that always kept their pink even when the rest of her face was pale. Her employers, who at first might be struck by her indifference, understood that anybody with that sort of mouth would get through the work.

After the shopping-lists had been gone over, Percy took up the question of the honeymoon. Stella said she had been thinking of Atlantic City. Percy met her with firmness. Whatever happened, he couldn't leave his books now.

"I want to do my traveling right here on Forty-second Street, with a high-price show every night," he declared. He made out an itinerary, punctuated by theaters and restaurants, which Stella consented to accept as a substitute for Atlantic City.

"They give your fellows a week off when they're married, don't they?" she asked.

"Yes, but I'll want to drop into the office every morning to look after my mail. That's only businesslike."

"I'd like to have you treated as well as the others, though." Stella turned the rings about on her pale hand and looked at her polished finger-tips.

"I'll look out for that. What do you say to a little walk, Stell'?" Percy put the question coaxingly. When Stella was pleased with him she went to walk with him, since that was the only way in which Percy could ever see her alone. When she was displeased, she said she was too tired to go out. To-night she smiled at him incredulously, and went to put on her hat and gray fur piece.

Once they were outside, Percy turned into a shadowy side street that was only partly built up, a dreary waste of derricks and foundation holes, but comparatively solitary. Stella liked Percy's steady, sympathetic silences; she was not a chatterbox herself. She often wondered why she was going to marry Bixby instead of Charley Greengay. She knew that Charley would go further in the world. Indeed, she had often coolly told herself that Percy would never go very far. But, as she admitted with a shrug, she was "weak to Percy." In the capable New York stenographer, who estimated values coldly and got the most for the least outlay, there was something left that belonged to another kind of woman--something that liked the very things in Percy that were not good business assets. However much she dwelt upon the effectiveness of Greengay's dash and color and assurance, her mind always came back to Percy's neat little head, his clean-cut face, and warm, clear, gray eyes, and she liked them better than Charley's fullness and blurred floridness. Having reckoned up their respective chances with no doubtful result, she opposed a mild obstinacy to her own good sense. "I guess I'll take Percy, _anyway_," she said simply, and that was all the good her clever business brain did her.

* * * * *

Percy spent a night of torment, lying tense on his bed in the dark, and figuring out how long it would take him to pay back the money he was advancing to himself. Any fool could do it in five years, he reasoned, but he was going to do it in three. The trouble was that his expensive courtship had taken every penny of his salary. With competitors like Charley Greengay, you had to spend money or drop out. Certain birds, he reflected ruefully, are supplied with more attractive plumage when they are courting, but nature hadn't been so thoughtful for men. When Percy reached the office in the morning he climbed on his tall stool and leaned his arms on his ledger. He was so glad to feel it there that he was faint and weak-kneed.

* * * * *

Oliver Remsen, Junior, had brought new blood into the Remsen Paper Company. He married shortly after Percy Bixby did, and in the five succeeding years he had considerably enlarged the company's business and profits. He had been particularly successful in encouraging efficiency and loyalty in the employees. From the time he came into the office he had stood for shorter hours, longer holidays, and a generous consideration of men's necessities. He came out of college on the wave of economic reform, and he continued to read and think a good deal about how the machinery of labor is operated. He knew more about the men who worked for him than their mere office records.

Young Remsen was troubled about Percy Bixby because he took no summer vacations--always asked for the two weeks' extra pay instead.

Other men in the office had skipped a vacation now and then, but Percy had stuck to his desk for five years, had tottered to his stool through attacks of grippe and tonsilitis. He seemed to have grown fast to his ledger, and it was to this that Oliver objected. He liked his men to stay men, to look like men and live like men. He remembered how alert and wide-awake Bixby had seemed to him when he himself first came into the office. He had picked Bixby out as the most intelligent and interested of his father's employees, and since then had often wondered why he never seemed to see chances to forge ahead. Promotions, of course, went to the men who went after them. When Percy's baby died, he went to the funeral, and asked Percy to call on him if he needed money. Once when he chanced to sit down by Bixby on the elevated and found him reading Bryce's "American Commonwealth," he asked him to make use of his own large office library. Percy thanked him, but he never came for any books. Oliver wondered whether his bookkeeper really tried to avoid him.

One evening Oliver met the Bixbys in the lobby of a theater. He introduced Mrs. Remsen to them, and held them for some moments in conversation. When they got into their motor, Mrs. Remsen said:

"Is that little man afraid of you, Oliver? He looked like a scared rabbit."

Oliver snapped the door, and said with a shade of irritation:

"I don't know what's the matter with him. He's the fellow I've told you about who never takes a vacation. I half believe it's his wife. She looks pitiless enough for anything."

"She's very pretty of her kind," mused Mrs. Remsen, "but rather chilling. One can see that she has ideas about elegance."

"Rather unfortunate ones for a bookkeeper's wife. I surmise that Percy felt she was overdressed, and that made him awkward with me. I've always suspected that fellow of good taste."

After that, when Remsen passed the counting-room and saw Percy screwed up over his ledger, he often remembered Mrs. Bixby, with her cold, pale eyes and long lashes, and her expression that was something between indifference and discontent. She rose behind Percy's bent shoulders like an apparition.

One spring afternoon Remsen was closeted in his private office with his lawyer until a late hour. As he came down the long hall in the dusk he glanced through the glass partition into the counting-room, and saw Percy Bixby huddled up on his tall stool, though it was too dark to work. Indeed, Bixby's ledger was closed, and he sat with his two arms resting on the brown cover. He did not move a muscle when young Remsen entered.

"You are late, Bixby, and so am I," Oliver began genially as he crossed to the front of the room and looked out at the lighted windows of other tall buildings. "The fact is, I've been doing something that men have a foolish way of putting off. I've been making my will."

"Yes, sir." Percy brought it out with a deep breath.

"Glad to be through with it," Oliver went on. "Mr. Melton will bring the paper back to-morrow, and I'd like to ask you to be one of the witnesses."

"I'd be very proud, Mr. Remsen."

"Thank you, Bixby. Good night." Remsen took up his hat just as Percy slid down from his stool.

"Mr. Remsen, I'm told you're going to have the books gone over."

"Why, yes, Bixby. Don't let that trouble you. I'm taking in a new partner, you know, an old college friend. Just because he is a friend, I insist upon all the usual formalities. But it is a formality, and I'll guarantee the expert won't make a scratch on your books. Good night. You'd better be coming, too." Remsen had reached the door when he heard "Mr. Remsen!" in a desperate voice behind him. He turned, and saw Bixby standing uncertainly at one end of the desk, his hand still on his ledger, his uneven shoulders drooping forward and his head hanging as if he were seasick. Remsen came back and stood at the other end of the long desk. It was too dark to see Bixby's face clearly.

"What is it, Bixby?"

"Mr. Remsen, five years ago, just before I was married, I falsified the books a thousand dollars, and I used the money." Percy leaned forward against his desk, which took him just across the chest.

"What's that, Bixby?" Young Remsen spoke in a tone of polite surprise. He felt painfully embarrassed.

"Yes, sir. I thought I'd get it all paid back before this. I've put back three hundred, but the books are still seven hundred out of true. I've played the shortages about from account to account these five years, but an expert would find 'em in twenty-four hours."

"I don't just understand how--" Oliver stopped and shook his head.

"I held it out of the Western remittances, Mr. Remsen. They were coming in heavy just then. I was up against it. I hadn't saved anything to marry on, and my wife thought I was getting more money than I was. Since we've been married, I've never had the nerve to

tell her. I could have paid it all back if it hadn't been for the unforeseen expenses."

Remsen sighed.

"Being married is largely unforeseen expenses, Percy. There's only one way to fix this up: I'll give you seven hundred dollars in cash to-morrow, and you can give me your personal note, with the understanding that I hold ten dollars a week out of your pay-check until it is paid. I think you ought to tell your wife exactly how you are fixed, though. You can't expect her to help you much when she doesn't know."

* * * * *

That night Mrs. Bixby was sitting in their flat, waiting for her husband. She was dressed for a bridge party, and often looked with impatience from her paper to the Mission clock, as big as a coffin and with nothing but two weights dangling in its hollow framework. Percy had been loath to buy the clock when they got their furniture, and he had hated it ever since. Stella had changed very little since she came into the flat a bride. Then she wore her hair in a Floradora pompadour; now she wore it hooded close about her head like a scarf, in a rather smeary manner, like an Impressionist's brush-work. She heard her husband come in and close the door softly. While he was taking off his hat in the narrow tunnel of a hall, she called to him:

"I hope you've had something to eat down-town. You'll have to dress right away." Percy came in and sat down. She looked up from the evening paper she was reading. "You've no time to sit down. We must start in fifteen minutes."

He shaded his eyes from the glaring overhead light.

"I'm afraid I can't go anywhere to-night. I'm all in."

Mrs. Bixby rattled her paper, and turned from the theatrical page to the fashions.

"You'll feel better after you dress. We won't stay late."

Her even persistence usually conquered her husband. She never forgot anything she had once decided to do. Her manner of following it up grew more chilly, but never weaker. To-night there was no spring in Percy. He closed his eyes and replied without moving:

"I can't go. You had better telephone the Burks we aren't coming. I have to tell you something disagreeable."

Stella rose.

"I certainly am not going to disappoint the Burks and stay at home to talk about anything disagreeable."

"You're not very sympathetic, Stella."

She turned away.

"If I were, you'd soon settle down into a pretty dull proposition. We'd have no social life now if I didn't keep at you."

Percy roused himself a little.

"Social life? Well, we'll have to trim that pretty close for a while. I'm in debt to the company. We've been living beyond our means ever since we were married."

"We can't live on less than we do," Stella said quietly. "No use in taking that up again."

Percy sat up, clutching the arms of his chair.

"We'll have to take it up. I'm seven hundred dollars short, and the books are to be audited to-morrow. I told young Remsen and he's going to take my note and hold the money out of my pay-checks. He could send me to jail, of course."

Stella turned and looked down at him with a gleam of interest.

"Oh, you've been playing solitaire with the books, have you? And he's found you out! I hope I'll never see that man again. Sugar face!" She said this with intense acrimony. Her forehead flushed delicately, and her eyes were full of hate. Young Remsen was not her idea of a "business man."

Stella went into the other room. When she came back she wore her evening coat and carried long gloves and a black scarf. This she began to arrange over her hair before the mirror above the false fireplace. Percy lay inert in the Morris chair and watched her. Yes, he understood; it was very difficult for a woman with hair like that to be shabby and to go without things. Her hair made her conspicuous, and it had to be lived up to. It had been the deciding factor in his fate.

Stella caught the lace over one ear with a large gold hairpin. She repeated this until she got a good effect. Then turning to Percy, she began to draw on her gloves.

"I'm not worrying any, because I'm going back into business," she said firmly. "I meant to, anyway, if you didn't get a raise the first of the year. I have the offer of a good position, and we can

live in an apartment hotel."

Percy was on his feet in an instant.

"I won't have you grinding in any office. That's flat."

Stella's lower lip quivered in a commiserating smile. "Oh, I won't lose my health. Charley Greengay's a partner in his concern now, and he wants a private secretary."

Percy drew back.

"You can't work for Greengay. He's got too bad a reputation. You've more pride than that, Stella."

The thin sweep of color he knew so well went over Stella's face.

"His business reputation seems to be all right," she commented, working the kid on with her left hand.

"What if it is?" Percy broke out. "He's the cheapest kind of a skate. He gets into scrapes with the girls in his own office. The last one got into the newspapers, and he had to pay the girl a wad."

"He don't get into scrapes with his books, anyway, and he seems to be able to stand getting into the papers. I excuse Charley. His wife's a pill."

"I suppose you think he'd have been all right if he'd married you," said Percy, bitterly.

"Yes, I do." Stella buttoned her glove with an air of finishing something, and then looked at Percy without animosity. "Charley and I both have sporty tastes, and we like excitement. You might as well live in Newark if you're going to sit at home in the evening. You oughtn't to have married a business woman; you need somebody domestic. There's nothing in this sort of life for either of us."

"That means, I suppose, that you're going around with Greengay and his crowd?"

"Yes, that's my sort of crowd, and you never did fit into it. You're too intellectual. I've always been proud of you, Percy. You're better style than Charley, but that gets tiresome. You will never burn much red fire in New York, now, will you?"

Percy did not reply. He sat looking at the minute-hand of the eviscerated Mission clock. His wife almost never took the trouble to argue with him.

"You're old style, Percy," she went on. "Of course everybody marries

and wishes they hadn't, but nowadays people get over it. Some women go ahead on the quiet, but I'm giving it to you straight. I'm going to work for Greengay. I like his line of business, and I meet people well. Now I'm going to the Burks'."

Percy dropped his hands limply between his knees.

"I suppose," he brought out, "the real trouble is that you've decided my earning power is not very great."

"That's part of it, and part of it is you're old-fashioned." Stella paused at the door and looked back. "What made you rush me, anyway, Percy?" she asked indulgently. "What did you go and pretend to be a spender and get tied up with me for?"

"I guess everybody wants to be a spender when he's in love," Percy replied.

Stella shook her head mournfully.

"No, you're a spender or you're not. Greengay has been broke three times, fired, down and out, black-listed. But he's always come back, and he always will. You will never be fired, but you'll always be poor." She turned and looked back again before she went out.

* * * * *

Six months later Bixby came to young Oliver Remsen one afternoon and said he would like to have twenty dollars a week held out of his pay until his debt was cleared off.

Oliver looked up at his sallow employee and asked him how he could spare as much as that.

"My expenses are lighter," Bixby replied. "My wife has gone into business with a ready-to-wear firm. She is not living with me any more."

Oliver looked annoyed, and asked him if nothing could be done to readjust his domestic affairs. Bixby said no; they would probably remain as they were.

"But where are you living, Bixby? How have you arranged things?" the young man asked impatiently.

"I'm very comfortable. I live in a boarding-house and have my own furniture. There are several fellows there who are fixed the same way. Their wives went back into business, and they drifted apart."

With a baffled expression Remsen stared at the uneven shoulders under the skin-fitting alpaca desk coat as his bookkeeper went out.

He had meant to do something for Percy, but somehow, he reflected, one never did do anything for a fellow who had been stung as hard as that.

Century, May 1916



THE MAGIC CAPE

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Little Aliens*, by Myra Kelly
1910

The heart of the janitor of an East Side school is not commonly supposed to be a tender organ. And yet to Miss Bailey, busy with roll-books and the average attendance of First Readers, there entered the janitor with an air half apologetic, half defiant. There was snow upon the janitor's cap and little icicles upon his red mustache, for a premature blizzard had closed down upon New York during the last days of November.

"Well, Mr. McGrath, what can I do for you?" asked Miss Bailey pleasantly, for McGrath was the true despot of the school, controlling light and air and heat and cold, and his good-will was a thing worth having.

"I just stepped in," answered this kindly god of the machine, "to pass the remark that there's one of your children, a girl what oughtn't to be left down in the yard with the others, waiting for the bell to ring and let them up. She ain't dressed for it."

"So few of them are," said Miss Bailey sadly. "I wish you could send them all straight up here instead of lining them up in the cold. Some of them are so determined to be in time that they have to wait down there for ten or fifteen minutes."

"I know they do," the janitor acquiesced. "But I can't let them all up. But this little girl I'm telling you about--you know her--she wears a blue gingham dress, and"--he dropped his voice to confidential pitch--"and mighty little else as I can see."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Bailey, "that is Becky Zabrowsky."

"Well, I could pass _her_ right straight up to you here where it's warm."

I'm a married man myself, and I've got kids of my own, so I guess you'll excuse me butting in on this."

"But I shall be very grateful to you," cried Teacher. "It breaks my heart to see her. And she comes dressed just as you say, whatever the weather may be."

After a few professional questions as to heating and sweeping, after taking the temperature of the radiators with a thermometric hand, and examining their valves, the janitor withdrew, and when Miss Bailey reached Room 18 on the next morning, Becky Zabrowsky, as blue of lips and fingers as of vesture, was waiting for her. And indeed her costume gave cause for pity, even as her smile and her bravery gave cause for tears. Besides the gingham dress referred to by the janitor, she wore a pair of black and pink stockings, of mature growth and many holes, flapping adult shoes with all the buttons gone, and a hair ribbon which had begun life as a bandage. That was all. But she was clean. And her self-respect made her seven years as high a barrier against patronage as though they had been seventy. She was as proudly and as sensitively on her guard as though she were an old marquise fallen upon evil days, and obliged to give lessons in French or die, and who was restrained from the bitter and pleasanter alternative only by religion.

Miss Bailey was accustomed to more normal children. As a rule her little First Readers took all that was offered to them, and a good deal that was not. Their consumption of Kindergarten materials--colored paper, colored sticks, chalks, pencils, books--anything which could be cached upon the human body--was colossal, and only an eagle eye and a large corps of subsidized monitors kept the balance true between the number of "young learners" and the number of readers. But this particular little Becky had none of these taking ways. Had she been like other Beckies and Rachels, Miss Bailey would have bought her a little shawl and a few suits of underwear. With this particular Becky such a liberty was out of the question. Teacher had encountered the Zabrowsky spirit once, and had been defeated by it.

That had been upon the question of lunch. Teacher had noticed that Becky frequently remained at school during the luncheon hour, but that she never ate anything. Other little girls sometimes urged refreshment upon her in vain. Miss Bailey, wise by this time in the laws of kosher and of traff, the clean and the unclean, according to Mosaic dietary laws, suggested a glass of milk at a neighboring dairy, or a roll from the delicatessen shop across the street. Any one of her charges would starve cheerfully to death or at the hospital ward before they would touch any of her food. She was a Christian, and though they loved her, learned from her, and honored her, they, like Shylock of old, would not eat with her. And Becky Zabrowsky, adding pride unto faith, and manners unto both, would smile her heart-breaking smile, shake her bandage-bowed head, and go on starving.

"Teacher, I tells you s'cuse, I don't needs I shall eat," was her always

courteous answer. And not all Miss Bailey's tact or wiles could prevail against it.

It was at about this time that Miss Bailey in her unofficial capacity accepted an invitation to a costume dance. Looking through old trunks and long-neglected shelves, she came upon a little tight-fitting shoulder cape of prehistoric date and fashion. It was such a cape as you can find in some of Du Maurier's drawings. It pinned the wearer's arms to her side, it gagged her tightly around the throat, it was of velvet, and its color was royal blue.

Constance Bailey, peering back into the dim vista of the years, could remember the pride and happiness which she had felt when her over-indulgent grandmother had given her, then a child of about twelve, this gorgeous garment. She could remember how it had dwarfed and faded the rest of her wardrobe, how she had wept to wear it upon all possible and impossible occasions, and how tragic had been the moment when it refused to meet across her loving breast.

Here, she thought triumphantly, was something before which the Zabrowsky spirit would break down. It did not in any way suggest the useful, serviceable, humiliating, charitable devotion. It was gay and festive, palpably a gift, and Teacher, with many misgivings but some hope, submitted it to Becky's consideration. She represented that she had herself outgrown it, that she had no costume with which it could appropriately be worn, that it was menaced by moths, a prey to creases, and a responsibility under which she could no longer find peace or security. Under the circumstances, she pleaded, would Becky relieve her of it? And Becky was delighted, translated, enchanted. She would never allow that cape to hang with the ordinary outdoor apparel of the other members of the class. It rested in her desk when she was busy, and she lulled it in her arms when she was not. Before coming into this shining fortune she had been rather looked down upon by other members of the class, and had avoided publicity in every possible way. She had with chattering teeth and livid lips assured her more warmly clad classmates that she was "all times too hot on the skin," and that her mamma considered her Sunday coat too stylish to wear at school. But, girded in blue velvet, she was another child. Once the most retiring of the class, she now became the least so. Once the most studious, she now yearned to be sent on outpost duty, on small shopping expeditions for her teacher, to the Principal's office, or to other class rooms with notes or with new students. And upon all these expeditions she wore an air of conscious correctness and the royal-blue velvet cape. She had once been the most truthful of small persons, but the glory of the cape tinged everything, and she allowed the other children to infer--nay, she even definitely stated--that this was the Sunday coat earlier referred to, and that she was wearing it to school because it had been superseded by another even more wonderful. Her auditors were too impressed to be unconvinced, and, to cover her very literal nakedness in every other respect, she invented for herself an entirely new disease.

"Say, Becky," one of the little girls in her class asked her, "don't you never put yourself on mit underwear nor underclothes? Ain't you scared you should to get cold in your bones? My mamma, she puts me on mit all from wool underwear--costs twenty-seven cents a suit by Grand Street--and I puts them on when the school opens, and I don't takes them off to the fourth of July."

"Oh," retorted Becky, with more truth than she knew, "it ain't so awful healthy you should make like that. My mamma says it is healthy for me the wind shall come on my skin. She says sooner no wind comes outside of your skin, no blood could go inside of your skin. And don't you know how teacher says what somebody what ain't got blood going in them is dead ones?"

"Und you _likes_," marvelled her friend, "you _likes_ the wind shall blow on you?"

"Sure," lied Becky, with a shiver, and she certainly had her wish.

But these appearances were only kept up for the eyes of the common herd. In the sanctuary of Teacher's confidence she was more unreserved, and whenever she could secure that young lady's kind ear, she bombarded it with gratitude and with reports of the impression made in the neighborhood of her one-roomed home by the shining splendor of that precious gift.

"Sooner I comes on mine house," she reported, "sooner all the ladies opens the doors and rubbers on mine cape. Sooner I walks by my block all the children wants I shall let them wear it. Only I won't let nobody wear it the while it is a present off of you."

"That's very nice of you," smiled Miss Bailey, not surprised at this new delicacy of feeling in so small and unfortunate and sorely tried a heart. "Very nice of you indeed."

"Sure I won't let anybody wear it," reiterated Becky, "not 'out they pays me a penny for walkin' up and down the block, and two cents for walkin' all round the block mit mine stylish from-plush cape."

"Of course not," Teacher agreed, hastily adjusting herself to this standard of right dealing.

"No, ma'am," said Becky. "I should never leave nobody have nothings what you gives me 'out they pays me good. The lady of our floor, she goes on a dancing-ball over yesterday, and she wants I shall leave her put her on mit mine cape--she's a awful little lady--only she don't wants she shall pay me. Und so I ain't let her take it, the while you gives it to me, and I am loving much mit you."

A teacher who gains the confidence of her small charges, even to a slight degree, is sure to be made familiar with their family history

unto the third or fourth generation. And so Teacher knew that the poverty of Becky's home life was embittered and made even harder to bear by the contrasting elegance of an aunt, who lived, amid rank and fashion, in the "tony" purlieus of Cherry Street. Her abode consisted, according to her smarting small relative, of "a room and a closet," a lavish and extravagant area for a household as small as hers.

"Why," Becky informed Miss Bailey, with upturned palms, upscrewed shoulders, and upturned eyes, "my aunt, she ain't got only five children and three boarders!"

It had been the habit of this rich and fashionable dame to pay visits of state and ceremony to her less fortunate sister-in-law, whose abode differed from hers only by the subtraction of the room. There, in the chaste consciousness of an incredible wig and an impenetrable shawl, she would monopolize many hundreds of cubic feet of space and air; indulge in conversations of the elegant and fashionable kind, which, so Becky reported to her teacher, "makes the tears in my mamma's eyes, and gives my papa shamed feelings," and caused an epidemic of ill-temper, with resulting slaps and kicks and yelling among her nephews and nieces.

"And what you think?" Becky had sadly added; "she says like that all times on my mamma, out of Jewish, she says: 'Why don't you never come over for see me?' Und my mamma, she says all times, mit more tears in the eyes--bend down your head, Teacher. I likes I shall whisper mit you in your ear--she couldn't come the whiles she ain't got nothing she could wear on the block. My papa has fierce feelings over it. He says like that, his sister--that's my aunt--is awful nosy."

Teacher often pondered as to whether it were possible, or even desirable, to provide the means to more frequent intercourse between the two families. She knew that this would mean shopping; that any article of her own apparel, or that of any of her friends, would be inadequate to enshroud the matronly form of Becky's mother, for years of confinement to the house, years of sedentary occupation, and years of ill-considered and ill-adapted diet had co-operated to produce almost geographical outlines in Mrs. Zabrowsky. Mountains, valleys, promontories, and plains seemed the terms most suitable to describe her, and she looked about as movable as these natural formations. Teacher thought of waiting until Christmas time, and of then doing something anonymously. Meanwhile the episode of the cape occurred, and some weeks later Becky reported with triumph:

"Teacher, what you think?" this was always her opening phrase; "my stylish aunt by Cherry Street, she goes and has a party, und my papa he goes on the party, und my mamma, she goes by my papa's side."

"Then she bought a shawl," cried Teacher. "I am ever and ever so glad."

Becky shook her head.

"No, ma'am, she don't needs she shall buy no shawl. She puts her on mit mine blue from-plush cape."

A vision of Becky's mother rose before Teacher's eyes, flanked by another of the tiny cape, and she laughed.

"But that is impossible, my dear. She couldn't."

"Teacher, she does."

"But, Becky," cried Teacher, "how could she? You know that the cape is too small for me, and it is only the right size for you, and you know your mamma is twice as big as both of us. So how could she wear it, dear? It never could have hooked up the front."

"No, ma'am, it didn't hook," Becky admitted. "My mamma's back needs the most of it, und in front it don't fits very good, only that makes mit my mamma nothings. She goes on my nosy auntie's party mit proud feelings, the while she knows how her back is stylish. Und in the front where the cape don't goes, my mamma, she wears my little sister."

"What!" gasped my friend. "What did you say she wore in the front?"

"She wears the baby," Becky repeated. "Und my nosy auntie's awful fresh. She says like that on my mamma: 'Don't you likes you shall lay the baby down by the bed?' She says like that, the while she knows my mamma ain't got capes only in back, und she wants my mamma shall have shamed feelings before all the peoples what is on the party. Und my mamma, she says like that, just as smart, she says: 'No, I guess I don't likes I shall lay my baby on no strange beds. It ain't healthy, maybe.' And she holds the baby, and nobody knows how the front from that cape is, und my mamma enjoyed a pleasant time, and my papa had a proud."



From: ABIGAIL ADAMS, to her husband, John.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*

5 July, 1775.

I have received a good deal of paper from you. I wish it had been more covered; the writing is very scant, yet I must not grumble. I know your time is not yours nor mine. Your labors must be great and your mouth closed; but all you may communicate, I beg you would. There is a

pleasure, I know not whence it arises, nor can I stop now to find it out, but I say there is a degree of pleasure in being able to tell news, especially any that so nearly concerns us, as all your proceedings do.

I should have been more particular, but I thought you knew everything that passed here. The present state of the inhabitants of Boston is that of the most abject slaves, under the most cruel and despotic of tyrants. Among many instances I could mention, let me relate one. Upon the 17th of June, printed handbills were posted up at the corners of the streets, and upon houses, forbidding any inhabitants to go upon their houses, or upon any eminence, on pain of death; the inhabitants dared not to look out of their houses, nor to be heard or seen to ask a question. Our prisoners were brought over to the Long Wharf, and there lay all night, without any care of their wounds, or any resting-place but the pavements, until the next day, when they exchanged it for the jail, since which we hear they are civilly treated. Their living cannot be good, as they can have no fresh provisions; their beef, we hear, is all gone, and their wounded men die very fast, so that they have a report that the bullets were poisoned. Fish they cannot have, they have rendered it so difficult to procure; and the admiral is such a villain as to oblige every fishing schooner to pay a dollar every time it goes out. The money that has been paid for passes is incredible. Some have given ten, twenty, thirty, and forty dollars, to get out with a small proportion of their things. It is reported and believed that they have taken up a number of persons and committed them to jail, we know not for what in particular. Master Lovell is confined in the dungeon; a son of Mr. Edes is in jail, and one Wiburt, a ship-carpenter, is now upon trial for his life. God alone knows to what length these wretches will go, and will, I hope, restrain their malice.

I would not have you be distressed about me. Danger, they say, makes people valiant. Hitherto I have been distressed, but not dismayed. I have felt for my country and her sons. I have bled with them and for them. Not all the havoc and devastation they have made has wounded me like the death of Warren. We want him in the Senate; we want him in his profession; we want him in the field. We mourn for the citizen, the senator, the physician, and the warrior. May we have others raised up in his room.

I have had a very kind and friendly visit from our dear friends Colonel Warren, lady, and son. Mrs. Warren spent almost a week with me, and he came and met her here, and kept Sabbath with me. I suppose she will write to you, though she says you are in her debt.

You scarcely make mention of Dr. Franklin. Surely he must be a valuable member. Pray what is become of your Judas? I see he is not with you upon the list of delegates. I wish I could come and see you. I never suffer myself to think you are about returning soon. Can it, will it be? May I ask, may I wish for it? When once I expect you, the time will crawl till I see you. But hush! Do you know it is eleven o'clock at night? We have had some very fine rains since I wrote you last. I hope we shall not now

have famine added to war. Grain, grain is what we want here. Meat we have enough, and to spare. Pray don't let Bass forget my pins. Hardwick has applied to me for Mr. Bass to get him a hundred of needles, number six, to carry on his stocking weaving. We shall very soon have no coffee, nor sugar, nor pepper, here; but whortleberries and milk we are not obliged to commerce for. I saw a letter of yours to Colonel Palmer, by General Washington. I hope I have one too. Good night. With thoughts of thee do I close my eyes. Angels guard and protect thee; and may a safe return ere long bless thy

PORTIA.



THE LURE OF THE BERRY

From: The Project Gutenberg eBook, *The Jonathan Papers*, by Elisabeth Woodbridge Morris
1912

Men have sung the praises of fishing and hunting, they have extolled the joys of boating and riding, they have dwelt at length upon the pleasures of automobiling. But there is one--sport, shall I call it?--which no one seems to have thought worth mentioning: the gentle sport of berrying.

Perhaps calling it a sport is an unfortunate beginning; it gives us too much to live up to. No, it is not a sport, though I can't think why, since it is quite as active as drop-line fishing. Perhaps the trouble is with the game--the fish are more active than the berries, and their excesses cover the deficiencies of the stolid figure in the boat.

What, then, shall we call it? Not an occupation; it is too desultory for that; nor an amusement, because of a certain tradition of usefulness that hangs about it. Probably it belongs in that small but select group of things that people do ostensibly because they are useful but really because they are fun. At any rate, it does not matter how we class it,--it is just berrying.

But not strawberrying. Strawberries are so far down, and so few! They cannot be picked with comfort by any one over six years old.

Nor blackberrying! Blackberries are good when gathered in, but in the gathering process there is nothing restful or soothing. They always grow in hot places, and the briars make you cross; they pull your hair and "sprout" your clothes and scratch your wrists. And the berries stain your fingers dark blue, and, moreover, they are frequented by those unpleasant little triangular, greenish-brown creatures known as squash bugs, which I do not believe even the Ancient Mariner could have been called upon to love. No, I do not mean blackberrying.

What then? What indeed but huckleberrying! How can I adequately sing the praises of the gentle, the neat, the comfortable huckleberry! No briers, no squash bugs, no back-breaking stoop or arm-rending stretch to reach them. Just a big, bushy, green clump, full of glossy black or softly blue berries, and you can sit right down on the tussocks among them, put your pail underneath a bush, and begin. At first, the handfuls drop in with a high-keyed "plinking" sound; then, when the "bottom is covered," this changes to a soft patter altogether satisfactory; and as you sit stripping the crisp branches and letting the neat little balls roll through your fingers, your spirit grows calm within you, you feel the breeze, you look up now and then over stretches of hill, or pasture, or sky, and you settle into a state of complete acquiescence in things as they are.

For there is always a breeze, and always a view, at least where my huckleberries grow. If any one should ask me where to find a good situation for a house, I should answer, with a comprehensive wave of my arm, "Oh, choose any huckleberry patch." Only 'twere pity to demolish so excellent a thing as a huckleberry patch, merely to erect so doubtful a thing as a house.

I know one such--a royal one even among huckleberry patches. To get to it you go up an old road,--up, and up, and up,--you pass big fields, newmown and wide open to the sky, you get broader and broader outlooks over green woodland and blue rolling hills, with a bit of azure river in the midst. You come out on great flats of rock, thinly edged with light turf, and there before you are the "berry lots," as the natives call them,--rolling, windy uplands, with nothing bigger than cedars and wild cherry trees to break their sweep. The berry bushes crowd together in thick-set patches, waist-high, interspersed with big "high-bush" shrubs in clumps or alone, low, hoary juniper, and great, dark masses of richly glossy, richly fragrant bay. The pointed cedars stand about like sentinels, stiff enough save where their sensitive tops lean delicately away from the wind. In the scant herbage between is goldenrod, the earliest and the latest alike at home here, and red lilies and asters, and down close to the ground, if you care to stoop for them, trailing vines of dewberries with their fruit, the sweetest of all the blackberries. Truly it is a goodly prospect, and one to fill the heart with satisfaction that the world is as it is.

The pleasure of huckleberrying is partly in the season--the late summer-time, from mid-July to September. The poignant joys of early spring are passed, and the exuberance of early summer, while the keen stimulus of fall has not yet come. Things are at poise. The haying is over, the meadows, shorn of their rich grass, lie tawny-green under the sky, and the world seems bigger than before. It is not a time for dreams nor a time for exploits; it is a time for--for--well, for berrying!

But you must choose your days carefully, as you do your fishing and hunting days. The berries "bite best" with a brisk west wind, though a

south one is not to be despised, and a north one gives a pleasant suggestion of fall while the sun has still all the fervor of summer. Choose a sky that has clouds in it, too, for you will feel their movement even when you do not look up. Then take your pail and set out. Do not be in a hurry and do not promise to be back at any definite time. Either go alone or with just the right companion. I do not know any circumstances wherein the choice of a companion needs more care than in berrying. It may make or mar the whole adventure. For you must have a person not too energetic, or a standard of speed will be established that will spoil everything; nor too conscientious--it is maddening to be told that you have not picked the bushes clean enough; nor too diligent, so that one feels guilty if one looks at the view or acknowledges the breeze; nor too restless, so that one is being constantly haled to fresh woods and pastures new. A slightly garrulous person is not bad, with a desultory, semi-philosophic bent, and a gift for being contented with easy physical occupation. In fact, I find that I am, by exclusion and inclusion, narrowing my description to fit a certain type of small boy. And indeed I believe that here the ideal companion is to be found,--if indeed he is not, as I more than suspect he is, the ideal companion for every form of recreation in life. Yes, the boy is the thing. Some of my choicest hours in the berry lots have been spent with a boy as companion, some boy who loves to be in the wind and sun without knowing that he loves it, who philosophizes without knowing that he does so, who picks berries with sufficient diligence sometimes, and with a delightful irresponsibility at other times; who likes to move on, now and then, but is happy to kick turf around the edges of the clump if you are inclined to stay. Who takes pride in filling his pail, but is not so desperately single-minded that he is unmoved by the seductions of goldenrod in bloom, of juniper and bayberries, of dry goldenrod stalks (for kite sticks), of deserted birds' nests, and all the other delights that fall in his way.

For berrying does not consist chiefly in getting berries, any more than fishing consists chiefly in getting fish, or hunting in getting birds. The essence of berrying is the state of mind that accompanies it. It is a semi-contemplative recreation, providing physical quiet with just enough motion to prevent restlessness--being, in this respect, like "whittling." I said semi-contemplative, because, while it seems to induce meditation, the beauty of it is that you don't really meditate at all, you only think you are doing so, or are going to. That is what makes it so recuperative in its effects. It just delicately shaves the line between stimulating you to thought and boring you because it does not stimulate. Thus it brings about in you a perfect state of poise most restful in itself and in a complete harmony with the midsummer season.

Yes, fishing is good, and hunting is good, and all the sports are good in their turn--even sitting in a rocking-chair on a boarding-house piazza has, perhaps, its charms and its benefits for some;--but when the sun is hot and the wind is cool, when the hay is in and the yellowing fields lie broad, when the woods have gathered their birds and their secrets to their very hearts, when the sky is deeply, warmly blue, and

the clouds pile soft or float thin and light, then give me a pail and let me wander up, up, to the great open berry lots. I will let the sun shine on me and the wind blow me, and I will love the whole big world, and I will think not a single thought, and at sundown I will come home with a full pail and a contentedly empty mind.



A FLOWERY JANUARY IN FLORIDA

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Palmetto-Leaves*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe

MANDARIN, FLA., Jan. 24, 1872.

Yes, it is done. The winter is over and past, and "the time of the singing of birds is come." They are at it beak and claw,--the red-birds, and the cat-birds, and the chattering jays, and the twittering sparrows, busy and funny and bright. Down in the swamp-land fronting our cottage, four calla-lily buds are just unfolding themselves; and in the little garden-plat at one side stand rose-geraniums and camellias, white and pink, just unfolding. Right opposite to the window, through which the morning sun is pouring, stands a stately orange-tree, thirty feet high, with spreading, graceful top, and varnished green leaves, full of golden fruit. These are the veritable golden apples of the Hesperides,--the apples that Atalanta threw in the famous race; and they are good enough to be run after. The things that fill the New-York market, called by courtesy "oranges,"--pithy, wilted, and sour,--have not even a suggestion of what those golden balls are that weigh down the great glossy green branches of yonder tree. At the tree's foot, Aunt Katy does her weekly washing in the open air the winter through. We have been putting our tape-measure about it, and find it forty-three inches in girth; and for shapely beauty it has no equal. It gives one a sort of heart-thrill of possession to say of such beauty, "It is mine." No wonder the Scripture says, "He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot." The orange-tree is, in our view, the best worthy to represent the tree of life of any that grows on our earth. It is the fairest, the noblest, the most generous, it is the most upspringing and abundant, of all trees which the Lord God caused to grow eastward in Eden. Its wood is white and hard and tough, fit to sustain the immense weight of its fruitage. Real good ripe oranges are very heavy; and the generosity of the tree inclines it to fruit in clusters. We counted, the other day, a cluster of eighteen, hanging low, and weighing down the limb.

But this large orange-tree, and many larger than this, which are parts

of one orchard, are comparatively recent growths. In 1835, every one of them was killed even with the ground. Then they started up with the genuine pluck of a true-born orange-tree, which never says die, and began to grow again. Nobody pruned them, or helped them, or cared much about them any way; and you can see trees that have grown up in four, five, and six trunks,--just as the suckers sprung up from the roots. Then, when they had made some progress, came the orange-insect, and nearly killed them down again. The owners of the land, discouraged, broke down the fences, and moved off; and for a while the land was left an open common, where wild cattle browsed, and rubbed themselves on the trees. But still, in spite of all, they have held on their way rejoicing, till now they are the beautiful creatures they are. Truly we may call them trees of the Lord, full of sap and greenness; full of lessons of perseverance to us who get frosted down and cut off, time and time again, in our lives. Let us hope in the Lord, and be up and at it again.

It is certainly quite necessary to have some such example before our eyes in struggling to found a colony here. We had such a hard time getting our church and schoolhouse!--for in these primitive regions one building must do for both. There were infinite negotiations and cases to go through before a site could be bought with a clear title; and the Freedman's Bureau would put us up a building where school could be taught on week-days, and worship held on Sundays: but at last it was done; and a neat, pleasant little place it was.

We had a little Mason and Hamlin missionary organ, which we used to carry over on Sundays, and a cloth, which converted the master's desk of week-days into the minister's pulpit; and as we had minister, organist, and choir all in our own family, we were sure of them at all events; and finally a good congregation was being gathered. On week-days a school for whites and blacks was taught, until the mismanagement of the school-fund had used up the sum devoted to common schools, and left us without a teacher for a year. But this fall our friend Mr. D., who had accepted the situation of county overseer of schools, had just completed arrangements to open again both the white and the black schools, when, lo! in one night our poor little schoolhouse was burned to the ground, with our Mason and Hamlin organ in it. Latterly it had been found inconvenient to carry it backward and forward; and so it had been left, locked in a closet, and met a fiery doom. We do not suppose any malicious incendiarism. There appears evidence that some strolling loafers had gotten in to spend the night, and probably been careless of their fire. The southern pine is inflammable as so much pitch, and will almost light with the scratch of a match. Well, all we had to do was to imitate the pluck of the orange-trees, which we immediately did. Our neighborhood had increased by three or four families; and a meeting was immediately held, and each one pledged himself to raise a certain sum. We feel the want of it more for the schoolhouse than even for the church. We go on with our Sunday services at each other's houses; but alas for the poor children, black and white, growing up so fast, who have been kept out of school now a year, and who are losing these best

months for study! To see people who are willing and anxious to be taught growing up in ignorance is the sorest sight that can afflict one; and we count the days until we shall have our church and schoolhouse again. But, meanwhile, Mandarin presents to our eyes a marvellously improved aspect. Two or three large, handsome houses are built up in our immediate neighborhood. Your old collaborator of "The Christian Union" has a most fascinating place a short distance from us, commanding a noble sweep of view up and down the river. On our right hand, two gentlemen from Newark have taken each a lot; and the gables of the house of one of them overlook the orange-trees bravely from the river.

This southern pine, unpainted, makes a rich, soft color for a house. Being merely oiled, it turns a soft golden brown, which harmonizes charmingly with the landscape.

How cold is it here? We ask ourselves, a dozen times a day, "What season is it?" We say, "This spring," "This summer," and speak of our Northern life as "last winter." There are cold nights, and, occasionally, white frosts: but the degree of cold may be judged from the fact that the Calla Ethiopica goes on budding and blossoming out of doors; that La Marque roses have not lost their leaves, and have long, young shoots on them; and that our handmaiden, a pretty, young mulattress, occasionally brings to us a whole dish of roses and buds which her devoted has brought her from some back cottage in the pine-woods. We have also eaten the last fresh tomatoes from the old vines since we came; but a pretty severe frost has nipped them, as well as cut off a promising lot of young peas just coming into pod. But the pea-vines will still grow along, and we shall have others soon.

We eat radishes out of the ground, and lettuce, now and then, a little nipped by the frost; and we get long sprays of yellow jessamine, just beginning to blossom in the woods.

Yes, it is spring; though still it is cold enough to make our good bright fire a rallying-point to the family. It is good to keep fire in a country where it is considered a great point to get rid of wood. One piles and heaps up with a genial cheer when one thinks, "The more you burn, the better." It only costs what you pay for cutting and hauling. We begin to find our usual number of letters, wanting to know all this, that, and the other, about Florida. All in good time, friends. Come down here once, and use your own eyes, and you will know more than we can teach you. Till when, adieu.



NEW YEAR'S DAWN-BROADWAY

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Rivers to the Sea*, by Sara Teasdale

WHEN the horns wear thin
And the noise, like a garment outworn,
Falls from the night,
The tattered and shivering night,
That thinks she is gay;
When the patient silence comes back,
And retires,
And returns,
Rebuffed by a ribald song,
Wounded by vehement cries,
Fleeing again to the stars--
Ashamed of her sister the night;
Oh, then they steal home,
The blinded, the pitiful ones
With their gew-gaws still in their hands,
Reeling with odorous breath
And thick, coarse words on their tongues.
They get them to bed, somehow,
And sleep the forgiving,
Comes thru the scattering tumult
And closes their eyes.
The stars sink down ashamed
And the dawn awakes,
Like a youth who steals from a brothel,
Dizzy and sick.



VENUS TRANSIENS

By Amy Lowell

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Some Imagist Poets*, by Various
1915

Tell me,
Was Venus more beautiful
Than you are,
When she topped
The crinkled waves,
Drifting shoreward

On her plaited shell?
Was Botticelli's vision
Fairer than mine;
And were the painted rosebuds
He tossed his lady,
Of better worth
Than the words I blow about you
To cover your too great loveliness
As with a gauze
Of misted silver?

For me,
You stand poised
In the blue and buoyant air,
Cinctured by bright winds,
Treading the sunlight.
And the waves which precede you
Ripple and stir
The sands at my feet.



TWILIGHT CALM.

Project Gutenberg's *The Land of Song, Book III*, by Various

O Pleasant eventide!
Clouds on the western side
Grow gray and grayer, hiding the warm sun:
The bees and birds, their happy labors done,
Seek their close nests and bide.

Screened in the leafy wood
The stockdoves sit and brood:
The very squirrel leaps from bough to bough
But lazily; pauses; and settles now
Where once he stored his food.

One by one the flowers close,
Lily and dewy rose
Shutting their tender petals from the moon:
The grasshoppers are still; but not so soon
Are still the noisy crows.

The dormouse squats and eats
Choice little dainty bits
Beneath the spreading roots of a broad lime;
Nibbling his fill he stops from time to time
And listens where he sits.

From far the lowings come
Of cattle driven home:
From farther still the wind brings fitfully
The vast continual murmur of the sea,
Now loud, now almost dumb.

The gnats whirl in the air,
The evening gnats; and there
The owl opes broad his eyes and wings to sail
For prey; the bat wakes; and the shell-less snail
Comes forth, clammy and bare.

Hark! that's the nightingale.
Telling the selfsame tale
Her song told when this ancient earth was young:
So echoes answered when her song was sung
In the first wooded vale.

We call it love and pain,
The passion of her strain;
And yet we little understand or know:
Why should it not be rather joy that so
Throbs in each throbbing vein?

In separate herds the deer
Lie; here the bucks, and here
The does, and by its mother sleeps the fawn:
Through all the hours of night until the dawn
They sleep, forgetting fear.

The hare sleeps where it lies,
With wary half-closed eyes:
The cock has ceased to crow, the hen to cluck:
Only the fox is out, some heedless duck
Or chicken to surprise.

Remote, each single star
Comes out, till there they are
All shining brightly: how the dew drops fall damp!
While close at hand the glowworm lights her lamp
Or twinkles from afar.

But evening now is done
As much as if the sun
Day-giving had arisen in the east:
For night has come; and the great calm has ceased,
The quiet sands have run.

CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI



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